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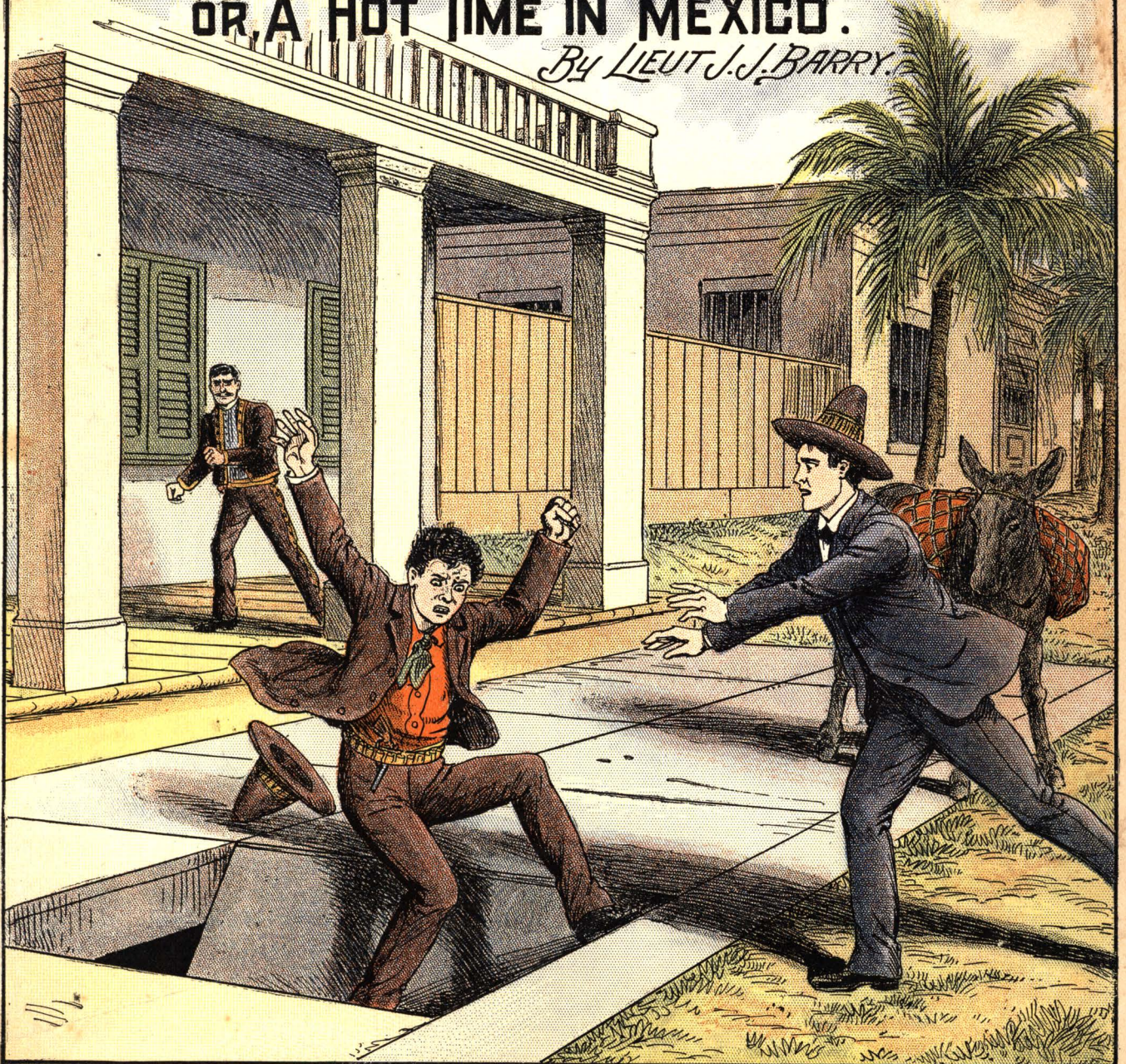
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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

ALL FOR PRESIDENT DIAZ; OR, A HOT TIME IN MEXICO.

By LIEUT. J. J. BARRY.



An ominous click under Tom Bolton's feet! He was shot downward, splashing in water. The instant before the stone clicked into place again his command floated up to terrified Tom: "Don't desert Isabel! Tell Diaz how his enemies destroy his friends."

WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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ALL FOR PRESIDENT DIAZ

OR,

A HOT TIME IN MEXICO

By LIEUT. J. J. BARRY

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT ALL STARTED.

"Eat hearty, Tom!"

"Same to you, Joe!"

It was a great place to get a good meal, in the Cafe Hidalgo, on the Calle Republica.

That latter name means "Street of the Republic," and the Cafe Hidalgo is one of the "swellest" restaurants on that famous street in the capital city of Mexico.

"The Lord only knows when we'll get another meal as good!" sighed Tom Bolton.

"Unless we go back and ship," gurgled Joe Lannon.

"Stop that!" cried Tom Bolton, sharply.

"I know we don't want to ship. But we have to eat," argued Lannon.

"Didn't I say this meal was going to change our luck?" demanded Tom Bolton. "Now, forget that we ever were on a ship. This meal will take our last four dollars, American money, which comes to about eight dollars in this lazy, glorious old country of Mexico. Now, what does eight dollars, Mex., amount to when it changes your luck. Enjoy your meal, Joe, old fellow, with all your Irish good sense."

"Faith, I'm enjoying it," replied Lannon, dipping again into a steaming dish.

The two boys sat at a table close to the street.

After the manner of stores and restaurants in Mexico the entire front of the great room was open upon the street.

The two American youngsters, while far enough from any other diners, were yet within a few feet of the people passing on the Calle Republica.

They had been ravenously hungry when they entered the Cafe Hidalgo.

With just four dollars in American money left between them, and with the future not extremely bright, they had recklessly agreed to have one good square meal, at least, in Mexico, and see if that meal would not introduce them to the bright side of life.

So here they were, the meal half through with now.

For three months the boys had been waiters on a passenger steamer plying between New York City and Vera Cruz, which is the port to the capital of Mexico.

Wages were not high in the steward's department on that steamer, nor had "tips" been over plentiful.

With sixty dollars between them the youngsters had left ship on the last arrival at Vera Cruz.

They had heard so much of golden chances in Mexico that they thirsted for a chance to tempt fate.

So far they had been nearly three weeks in the capital city.

American men, with capital, might find abundant chances for success in Mexico.

For American boys, however, there didn't seem to be a ghost of a show.

Lannon was for writing the steward of the ship, which was again at Vera Cruz, but Tom Bolton felt that he couldn't think of doing that while there was any chance

left on earth of getting along some other place than on a ship.

"I don't want to go home, Joe, and have the folks all give me the laugh," protested Tom Bolton.

"Faith, I'm thinking it will be the undertaker that'll be giving us the laugh here before many days," prophesied Lannon, dismally.

"I've come to Mexico to make a good thing for myself, and I've got to do it," retorted Bolton, stubbornly. "There are chances here, and I've got to find one of 'em. Now, Joe, if you're sick of it and want to back out——"

"Stop that before you get a fist between your teeth!" growled Lannon, indignantly. "Do I look like the fellow that'd desert a friend who had the hard luck to go crazy?"

Tom laughed, with a mouthful of food, with the result that some of the food got down the wrong way and he nearly strangled.

Anxious Lannon sprang up and thumped his friend between the shoulder-blades.

"It's all right," gasped Tom Bolton, still red in the face. "But be careful, next time, what you say to a fellow when he's eating three kinds of grub at once."

Tom Bolton's family, back in New Jersey, was poor enough.

Tom's father had put in his whole life trying to scrape enough together to support and educate ten children.

Every one of the children had received a public school education, and then had been turned loose on the world.

All of Tom's six brothers were grown up. Only one of them, Bill, had amounted to much in the way of securing the world's goods.

Bill had started as a clerk, had studied law, had become a lawyer, and from that got into politics.

He was reported to be rich, but if he was he never used any of his wealth to help other members of the family.

Tom, when his turn came to quit school, hungered for foreign lands.

As the easiest way for a poor boy to travel was to get a job on a ship, Tom had traveled between New York and Liverpool for six months, at one time laying off for a trip and spending his savings on a trip across England and into France.

But for the last three months he had been traveling to Mexico, which he had heard of as a Land of Easy Dollars.

On the last ship our hero had met Lannon, also poor and afflicted with a love of travel.

The two youngsters had speedily become friends.

From that they had developed into chums for life.

Joe Lannon was a New York boy, born and bred, but of Irish descent.

Up to the age of sixteen, Joe had attended the public schools in Gotham, but for the last year he, like our hero, had been permitted to make his own living.

Brother Bill Bolton, on hearing that Tom had planned to try for a strike in Mexico, had sent the boy a pompous letter, enclosing another to Brother Bill's friend, the Hon. Chauncey J. Stone, U. S. minister to Mexico.

"The American minister ought to be a good man to know," wrote Brother Bill. "But don't tell him that you've been working on a ship. Just put on your best clothes, and let the minister think you're traveling in search of a good thing in business. I hope you'll have more luck than some of your brothers!"

Promptly upon their arrival at the City of Mexico Tom and Joe had gone to the great white building of the American Embassy.

The Honorable Mr. Stone had received them very nicely, had chatted with them for a while, had offered them some advice, and had said, at parting:

"In Mexico, when you see a position with a business house, you are asked very particularly for your references. Fortunately, you will be able to refer to me, and I think that will be all you will need."

They had not seen the American minister again, but here, for three weeks, they had drifted around the great Spanish-American city, with the finest references to be had, but with no one in sight who needed two American boys.

"It's all right for Tom to say he don't want to go back to the ship," grumbled Joe Lannon to himself, as they neared the finish of that famous meal. "But I'm betting he'll be glad enough to do it in the next day or two. A fellow has to eat, and he has to have a place to sleep. Faith, it's lucky we'll be if we can get the steward to send us our tickets down to Vera Cruz."

From thinking so hard on that matter Lannon finally hit upon a brilliant scheme.

"'Twill do no harm to write the steward for the tickets. If we don't use 'em, we can send 'em back. I'll slip off this minute and do it."

Full of that plan, Lannon bolted down the last of his meal, excused himself, and hurried away to write a letter applying, in both their names, for their old jobs.

Tom Bolton, left briefly by himself, leaned back in his chair, watching the picturesque Mexican crowd on this late afternoon.

"I feel good, after that meal," sighed the boy. "I feel so good that, surely, something must be about to turn up."

An American face loomed up in the crowd—an American face framed under a big, cone-shaped Mexican straw hat.

The young man under that, dressed in white duck, detached himself from the crowd and came across the sidewalk to our hero, holding out his hand.

"I've seen him; I know him," flashed through the boy's mind. "Where? Who? Oh, I know now! That's Parker, the surveyor, who was so decent to us when we went to his office to apply for jobs as chain-men. Said he was sorry, but only Mexicans could stand the climate and hard work up in the mountains where he does most of his business. Wonder if he has changed his mind now?"

"Howdy, Bolton? greeted Parker, a man barely more than twenty-five, as he shook hands democratically with the boy. "Feeding well, eh? A bad plan in this climate. And how goes business?"

"Why, I thought you might have something, when I saw you coming," laughed Tom.

"Still on the outs, eh?" quizzed Parker. "Too bad. No; I haven't got a blessed thing. You know what I told you the other day—that this is no country for an American unless he has capital."

"I thought I had capital," sighed Tom. "It isn't every American here who can give the American minister as a reference."

"That's bully as a reference," Parker admitted, dropping into a chair. "But you see, the trouble is that no one wants Americans here, except the Americans who have money to sink in some wild-cat, get-rich-quick schemes for which these Mexicans are famous. Want some real good advice, Bolton?"

"Of course."

"It's this," spoke Parker, seriously, and leaning forward over the table, fixing his gaze keenly on our hero's face. "Get out of Mexico while you have the funds left! If you don't, you'll go from bad to worse, and land up on your uppers!"

"Quit Mexico?" cried Tom.

"That's it!"

"Not if I die here!"

"But it isn't pleasant, dying on the streets of hunger, and you'll soon come to that—unless you have wealth you can draw upon from home."

"I haven't," Tom admitted, ruefully, shaking his head.

"Then take good advice and get back to the good old U. S.!"

"You don't know me, or you wouldn't offer that kind of advice," Tom retorted, coolly, but spunkily. "When I set out to do a thing I'm going to do it. There's no turning back. There's no such thing as owning up licked! I may starve, as you say, Mr. Parker, but I won't be whipped—remember that!"

"I've heard others talk that way," nodded Parker. "I've known a few of 'em to die in the hospitals here, and the most that ailed 'em was irregularity of meals."

"I'll win out," predicted Tom, confidently.

"You'll wear out and die," grumbled Parker.

"Then I'll have the sport of dying in a good fight!" cried Tom, flushing. "But there's one thing I won't do while I've got breath, and that is to admit being licked. I'd sooner die than admit that I had to run away!"

"All right, then. Success to you, old chap!" cried Parker, rising and holding out his hand again. "There goes a chap I've got to overtake—business, you know!"

With a hasty handshake Parker was off and away in the crowd.

Joe Lannon, having finished his brief letter and mailed it on the sly, now came back looking as innocent as if he had not done the very thing that his chum forbade.

"What'll you be doing, now?" Joe asked, good-naturedly.

"We'd better be moving," Bolton replied. "There's an hour yet before the business offices close. Come—and we'll trust to luck."

An elderly Mexican, short, stout, with grizzled moustache and dark, quiet eyes that seemed able to "look through boards," now stepped over to the boys.

Unknown to our hero, this gentleman, for such he appeared to be, had been watching Bolton during the latter's talk with Parker.

"Pardon, young *senor*," interrupted this man with the dark, quiet eyes, "but I think I heard you say that you seek something to do in Mexico."

"That's right," Tom Bolton nodded, quickly, and turned eagerly to size up his man.

"You do not care what you do, if it be honest work?" asked the stranger, in a low voice.

"Not a bit, if it's honest."

"And I think I heard you say that the American minister, Mr. Stone, was your reference?"

"Yes."

Tom was beginning to be interested in this elderly Mexican, with the air of a gentleman and an English speech that was perfect.

"You would not mind danger?" asked the stranger, in a still lower tone.

"Mind danger?" retorted Tom. "We'd rather enjoy it."

"And you are quite sure that the American minister will vouch for you?" insisted this stranger.

"He said he would—up to the limit."

"Good, then! Will you come with me? I would talk with you?"

"Yours truly!" said Tom. "Lead the way, please."

"Do not walk with me," whispered the Mexican. "Just follow me at a little distance, until we reach my carriage."

With that, and not looking back, the stranger stepped out upon the sidewalk.

The two boys looked hard at each other.

"Now, what do you make of that?" throbbed Joe Lannon.

"A job, I hope," predicted Tom, hopefully.

"A job out of the sky, then!" smacked the Irish boy.

"Why, we'd take jobs up in the sky, if they were any good," smiled Bolton, as the two boys threaded their way through the crowd in the wake of their unknown friend.

That Mexican gentleman led them some distance down the Calle Republica, then around a corner down a side street, and around a second corner.

Here stood a closed carriage, to which were hitched a pair of splendid bays.

Their guide stepped inside the carriage. As the boys approached he motioned them to the front seat.

A solemn-faced driver closed the doors, then mounted and drove away.

Their Mexican, lighting a cigar, smoked slowly, thoughtfully, but did not speak.

The drive lasted for some fifteen minutes, during which time no word was spoken inside the carriage.

Then, in a quieter part of the city, the carriage stopped before a big, marble-faced building that had an official look. Over the entrance was the coat of arms of Mexico.

"It's a government building of some sort," Tom Bolton speculated, inwardly.

"Be good enough to follow me, young gentlemen," requested their strange guide, as he stepped out of the carriage.

He led the way inside the big building.

Two Mexican policemen on guard at the door solemnly saluted their guide, proving that he was a man of some official importance.

Down a corridor the Mexican led them, halting at last before a door guarded by another saluting policeman.

Past the policeman he led them into an office in which three clerks were seated at desks.

To one of these desks their guide beckoned them, then said in Spanish:

"Be good enough to write your names on a sheet of paper for me."

Tom reached out and wrote, then passed pen and paper to Lannon.

"Good," approved their guide. "I see that you understand Spanish."

"Oh, yes a little!" Tom replied, confidently.

He and his chum, in three months of service on the steamer, had had abundant chances to pick up some of the Spanish language, spoken by two-thirds of the passengers.

"Now," requested their guide, courteously, "will you be good enough to take seats here until I can communicate with the American minister? I must make sure, you know, that your credentials are good."

Their guide disappeared into an inner room.

"Well, what do you make of this?" demanded Lannon, in an eager whisper.

"If I knew, I'd claim it," smiled Tom. "But rest easy, old chum. This is the something turning up that I was so sure of."

"Faith, I hope you're right. We need it."

But a half an hour brought no change in the situation.

"I'm getting uncommonly nosey to find out where we are," grumbled Lannon, after having tried, in vain, to get any one of the three clerks in the office to talk.

"What are you going to do about it?" laughed Tom, in an undertone.

"Faith, I'm going to step outside and ask what building this is, anyway."

Tom turned and strode to the door. But one of the clerks rose and darted to that barrier ahead of him.

"Pardon, senor," urged the clerk, "but it is not permitted to leave."

"I can't leave, is it?" gasped Lannon.

"It is not permitted, senor; not without word from—the inside office."

"What's to hinder me going?" demanded Joe, with a grinning look at the narrow shoulders and weak chest of the clerk before him.

"The policeman just outside the door has orders," replied the clerk, calmly. "Believe me, senor, it will be much better to return to your seat."

"Now, what is this—a police station?" blurted the bewildered Lannon.

"Be patient, senor," urged the clerk, "and you will soon know all."

Hardly had Lannon dropped back in his seat when a door of the inner room opened. A clerk appeared, beckoning to the two Americans.

They stepped forward swiftly, curiously.

Yet that second room proved to be but the ante-room to a third.

Into that third room the boys stepped past the clerk, who, with a slight bow, held the door open for them, and closed it after them.

Here was their Mexican, seated at a huge desk by a window in a room some thirty feet square.

Except for the desk, and a business-like looking telephone on it, reinforced by a row of buttons of call-bells, this room looked as if it had been fitted up for the reception of visitors.

"Now, then, young senors," called their Mexican, in a brisk voice, without rising, "come over here to me. Take these seats"—pointing to two chairs placed at the outer corner of his desk.

For a moment or two the Mexican calmly studied the faces of the two American youngsters.

If there was anything in their whole make-up that he didn't see in that long, thorough glance with those wonderful eyes, it couldn't have been much worth knowing.

"Do you know who I am?" asked their Mexican.

"No, sir." Tom Bolton had on his business front now.

"Did you ever hear of Colonel Mendez?"

"No, sir."

"Many have," smiled their Mexican, "and I am he. Since you have not heard my name before, you probably do not know the nature of my work."

"I do not, sir," Tom admitted.

"I am chief of the political secret police of the republic," went on the colonel.

Then, ignoring Lannon, he turned to Tom with:

"I was impressed, Bolton, with the peculiar spirit and determination that you displayed, an hour ago, in the Cafe Hidalgo. I also gathered that you are here in Mexico seeking your fortune, and that you can't find it."

"We haven't found it yet, colonel," Tom corrected.

"Same thing," smiled their Mexican, gravely. "To proceed, young gentlemen, as I watched you it occurred to me that I could make important use of you and that you could find your start on the road to fortune in Mexico. That is, if you are fond of adventure, and if you are as reckless of danger as Bolton made it appear."

"We're listening hard, colonel," Tom ventured, trying to keep back the eager curiosity that consumed him.

"Would you enter the secret police, on a service that can be performed by Americans better than by Mexicans, and by boys better than men?" asked Colonel Mendez, looking at them searchingly.

"Is it honest work, colonel?" questioned Tom, rather bluntly.

"It is work ordered by the Mexican government—by his excellency, President Diaz, in fact," replied Mendez, flushing slightly.

"You'll pardon me, colonel, but I wish to make sure that it's good, clean, honest work," insisted Tom, somewhat embarrassed, yet at the same time determined to make it plain that he and Joe could not be enlisted for dirty work.

"It is lawful, honest work," replied Mendez, slowly. "It is a task of getting information for the government—information against its enemies. It is work, frankly, that involves a good deal of danger—and that danger will be paid for if you young men undertake the work and do it well."

Tom Bolton looked at the other boy. Joe nodded back.

"We'll take it, colonel!" declared our hero, with great promptness.

"Good!" cried Mendez, his eyes lighting up. "Then I accept you, for, while I kept you waiting, I sent a messenger to your American minister. Your credentials are excellent. I am satisfied. You agree to enter the Mexican secret police service?"

"We have agreed."

"Good. Wait!"

Mendez touched one of the bells over his desk, and one of the men from the outer office entered.

Tom and Joe, their right hands raised, took the oath of special service under the Mexican government.

"Now, if you were to break that oath," smiled Mendez, when the other Mexican had left the room, "you would be doomed to more years in a Mexican prison than I would care to think about. But you won't break your oath, of course."

After a brief pause the colonel resumed:

"In the State of Chohuca, in western Mexico, lives Don Carlos Céspedes, the owner of the Hacienda Bonita. You may have heard hints of revolutionary plots that are being hatched to drive President Diaz out of power. Don Carlos is, we know, the chief leader of the movement in the State of Chohuca.

"With him he has associated three foreigners—Trescott, an American, Beaudois, a Frenchman, and Donner, a German. We believe, though we do not know, that these foreigners are aiding the revolution much with money from abroad—for there are many people, both in Mexico and out of it, who would spend millions to see good old President Diaz driven out of power.

"Now, young gentlemen, what I wish of you is that you should go to Chohuca and make the favorable acquaintance of Don Carlos and his foreign friends. You will pose as wealthy young Americans, going through Mexico for a good time. It will not be a difficult pretense, for you will be supplied with money from this office.

"But you must be clever, tactful, agreeable, and above all you must give the impression of being reckless but dependable young dare-devils with a tinge of the lawless in your

make-up. In a word, you must manage to get yourselves enrolled in the revolutionary plot, and you must turn all the information you get over to Senor Sanchez, who is my agent in Chohuca. Will you undertake this, young gentlemen?"

"Yes!" Tom Bolton shot out, crisply.

"Good! I believe you will succeed," cried Colonel Mendez, his face glowing. "For boys will be hardly suspected by the enemy of double-dealing. Then you enter into this for me?"

"Heart and soul!" cried Tom Bolton eagerly.

"Heart and soul!" affirmed Lannon, soberly.

"Remember, you risk all for the service of President Diaz!" urged their Mexican, solemnly.

"All for President Diaz!" throbbed Tom Bolton.

"And it'll be a hot time in old Mexico, I'm thinking," muttered Joe Lannon, with prophetic insight.

CHAPTER II.

A CORNER IN ROMANCE.

"Now, for a nice, easy job," grinned Joe Lannon, "give me the hard task of playing off as young men of wealth."

"And with the treasury of Mexico back of the bluff," smiled Tom Bolton, speaking hardly above a whisper.

"Pinch me! Am I awake? I don't know."

"You're tickled, aren't you?" asked Tom, with a more serious face.

"Tickled? Faith, 'tis a tame word."

Lannon heaved a great sigh, then shot out:

"Oh, the glory of being rich! I wish it could keep up."

"It may, if we succeed in what we're up to now," hinted Bolton. "You know, Mendez told us that, if we put this game through to suit the government, there'd be nothing too good or big for us."

"Bluff, that!" declared Lannon, suspiciously.

"Think so?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I may be dotty, of course," admitted Tom. "But I gathered an idea that Mendez is as honest an old chap as can be found in a month's travel. He's been paid so many years for hunting up the truth that I hardly believe he'd know how to lie. Anyway, it's an interesting game he has given us to play. It suits me down to the ground. And, as he said, it's a game that an American can play better than a Mexican, and a game in which a boy stands a better show than a man."

"But Mendez——"

"Hush!" whispered Tom, warningly. "We're getting into the brush, now. Don't mention names, even in an undertone. Better not talk about anything but the weather. That brush ahead may have ears."

Lannon glanced ahead at the thick mesquite bushes and the dense chaparral that looks like our own scrub oak.

Truly, eavesdroppers could lurk finely in that dense brush that now littered the country close to that mountain road. For our young travelers were in Chohuca at last.

Traveling as far as they could come by the railroad, they

had reached the handsome, old-fashioned city of Tres Angeles (Three Angels.)

Here they had been met, stealthily, by Pedro Sanchez, Mendez' agent, whom they had recognized from a photograph shown them in Mendez' office in the city of Mexico.

From Sanchez they had received some additional instructions.

They were to proceed out to the Hacienda Bonita, there to make the effort to discover who were at the head of the revolutionary plan, and also who composed the rank and file of the disaffected party.

The morning of the day before they had left Tres Angeles behind on the thirty-odd miles of march into the rather wild country where the great Hacienda Bonita was situated.

The night before, twenty miles out from Tres Angeles, they had camped near the roadside. This morning they were finishing the journey to the immense ranch.

Ahead of them trod their guide, a chance fellow picked up in the city and recommended as honest.

Their guide tramped at the head of a burro, a tough little pack animal on the order of a diminutive mule.

To the burro were strapped their tent, a few cooking utensils, some food and two new outfits of tropical clothing.

For themselves, the young Americans rode on fairly good saddle mules.

During the last three hours they had been in saddle, having covered nearly ten miles.

Now they came into a more densely wooded part of the country.

Urging their mules forward, the boys caught up with their skinny, bronzed, active guide.

"How much further, Jose?" questioned Tom.

"Maybe two miles, senor; maybe three," answered the guide, easily.

"You said that half an hour ago."

"Well, senor, the distance has not grown greater since then."

"That's one comfort," laughed Tom, mopping at his dripping face and neck.

The boys were in the thinnest kind of clothing, bought in the City of Mexico before leaving.

On their heads were tall, cone-shaped straw hats of the lightest fabric, yet they sweltered.

It was furiously hot in the late forenoon.

Had they had a thermometer with them, it would have registered at least one hundred and twenty on that unshaded road.

For the mesquite and the chaparral, dense though they were, did not grow to great enough height to shade any part of the road.

"I've seen bits of country that beat this," growled Joe Lannon, as he reached for his three-pint, cloth-covered canteen to get a drink of water.

"Don't drink so much in the sun," advised Tom. "Take your water, as Jose does, when he's resting in the shade."

"If I didn't drink, I'd drop," argued Joe.

There was no use in arguing with a fellow who held to such a belief.

Now, the road led down through a little gorge.

High above them on either side towered the clay banks.

Some vegetation grew there. At the approach of the travelers lizards scooted to their holes up in those banks. Here and there a snake raised its head curiously or hissed angrily.

"Ugh!" shuddered Joe, as he caught sight of the reptiles.

"Got a horror of snakes, eh?" smiled Tom.

"I'm afraid of 'em," Joe admitted, honestly.

"That big black one that you see up there, senor," broke in the guide, "is a harmless reptile."

"Harmless!" uttered Joe, disgustedly.

"Some of our people keep a snake of that kind around the house, as you would a cat, to catch rats."

"I'd rather have the rats," Joe rejoined.

Suddenly the guide leaped about six feet across the roadway with a yell.

Then, hastily drawing the machete, or long, sword-like knife, that he wore at his belt, Jose cautiously returned, striking with unerring aim and cutting in two a bright-red little snake that swung from the low branch of a young tree.

"If you see any of these little pests, senor, beware of them," advised Jose, turning to Lannon.

"Dangerous? Those little red fellows?" Tom asked, curiously.

"So dangerous, senor, that one rarely recovers from the bite."

"Then I've got the little redskin down in my blacklist book," grunted Lannon.

"Hurry on out of this gorge, Jose," shuddered Tom. "I don't like to linger where there are such small packages of death hanging around."

"We shall be out in two minutes, senor," replied the guide, pointing ahead.

They were out in less than that time, and halted, looking down a valley road.

Up on the hillside beyond were imposing looking buildings, flanked by several smaller buildings.

"There, senors, are the buildings of the Hacienda Bonita. See, you are nearly at your journey's end."

"Nearly at the end of one stage of the journey," Tom corrected, cautiously. "We do not stay long at the Hacienda Bonita."

"No?" asked the guide, in some surprise. "I had supposed that the senors were perhaps interested in the tales of new finds of gold and silver on Don Carlos's lands."

"New finds of gold and silver, eh?" asked Tom, interested at once.

"Oh, yes, senor. Don Carlos has many men out prospecting."

Tom stealthily winked at Joe Lannon. This information gave them an excuse to offer for their uninvited visit to Don Carlos Cespedes.

Suddenly a slight scream from the valley below came up to their ears.

All three glanced hastily down below.

A girl had suddenly ridden into sight on a handsome mule.

From the roadside a handsomely dressed young Mexican had sprung out, barring the path of her animal.

That both girl and young man were talking rapidly was evident from their gestures.

"Ah, it is nothing," announced Jose, with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders. "It is the way some of our gallants, when they are hot-headed, have of making love."

"Thunder! The girl doesn't seem to like it!" uttered Tom, excitedly.

"Perhaps she only pretends that she doesn't," returned Jose.

"See that!"

The girl had raised her riding whip like a flash, bringing it down across the face of the fellow who stood in her path.

"Good!" glowed Tom.

"Bully!" approved Joe.

"But she'll have to kiss away the scar," chuckled Jose.

"Will she, though!" blurted Tom, indignantly. "Say, hold on! I can't stand that!"

For the gallant, not a whit abashed, had now sprung forward, wrenching the whip from the girl's hand.

"Help!" she screamed, this time turning her eyes appealingly up the path, for she had discovered Tom Bolton's party.

"Help?" echoed Tom. "You bet!"

He fairly dug the spurs into the flanks of the astonished mule under him.

The gallant had started to drag the girl from her saddle. But now he turned, glancing up the path.

He saw two indignant American boys riding toward him at a gallop.

It had become a race between Tom Bolton and Joe Lannon, but Tom won by a few lengths.

Suddenly the Mexican gallant had stepped back, folding his arms and glaring with flashing eyes.

As for the girl, Tom got never a glimpse of her as he rode up. All his attention was centered on the fellow.

Barely six feet away Tom pulled the mule up to a sudden stop, then sprang from saddle.

"Well," uttered the Mexican, with a scowl and a savage growl, "you have my permission, senors, to ride on your way."

"Your permission?" sneered Bolton, looking straight into the fellow's eyes. "What has that to do with it?"

"Pass on, senors!" ordered the fellow, insolently.

He was a handsome fellow. He would have been good to look upon had there not been so much of the pirate in his face.

He was dressed in the height of Mexican dandy fashion—the fashion of the dandies who abound in the parts of Mexico that are further from the railroads.

His trousers were of blue velvet, wide at the bottoms, slashed and braided with silver cord.

His shirt was snowy white, his short bolero jacket of crimson, slashed with gold cord.

On his head was a costly sombrero, decorated with at least two pounds of heavy silver cord.

He was tall for a Mexican, slim and wiry-looking.

Altogether, he looked like "a bad man" in an hour of trouble.

All this Tom Bolton took in at a glance.

Our hero did not care to have trouble, if it could be avoided decently.

But neither did Tom Bolton propose to run away from trouble, if it meant leaving this young lady to the unwelcome attentions of the fellow.

So far our hero had not had even a glimpse of the girl.

Something in the man's eyes made the young American feel that it would be best to watch him every instant.

"I have hinted," spoke the Mexican, wrathily, "that you might like to ride on your way."

"That we expect to do," Tom replied, coolly.

"Then go now."

"Yes; in case it is also the young lady's way. With her permission we shall ride with her until we see her safely with her friends."

"Oh, Senor Americano," murmured a soft, sweet voice that set Tom's blood tingling, "thank you! Thank you!"

"Will you ride on, and leave me to my own affairs with my sweetheart?" cried the Mexican, harshly.

"Senors," cried the girl, "he is not my sweetheart. He is a scoundrel. He would carry me off and force me into marriage."

"He shan't do it," Tom declared, promptly.

"For the last time," raged the Mexican, "will you Americans ride on and leave me to my affairs?"

"No," returned Tom, bluntly.

"Then guard yourself!"

The Mexican, his hand fumbling inside his shirt, now flashed out a stiletto.

Raising it, he leaped forward at Tom Bolton.

Just in the nick of time our hero ducked and dodged.

Now they came around again, facing each other pantingly.

"Oh, you murdering scoundrel!" yelled Joe Lannon.

"Oh, I'll soak you good for that dirty knife trick!"

The Mexican dodged, wheeling half around as Joe Lannon leaped for him from behind.

"Keep back, Joe!" yelled Tom. "This is my fight now. Don't rush in unless you see me go down worsted. I want this fellow to myself."

Tom himself had stood quietly on guard, waiting for Lannon to draw back out of the fight.

Now, when he understood that he had but one man to fight at a time, the Mexican turned again furiously upon our hero.

"Say your prayers, senor!" he cried, mockingly, and made a cunning, cat-like leap forward.

But Tom, reading the fellow's eyes, was ready and watchful.

Just as the Mexican sprang, Tom again dodged to one side, struck out his foot, caught one of the Mexican's feet in the air, and gave the fellow a swift, hitching trip.

Over backward went the gallant, striking on the back of his head.

Not an instant did Tom Bolton wait, but, closing in swiftly at one side, threw himself across his enemy, pinning him and holding the knife arm helpless.

Twist! Tom had the stiletto in his own hand. Leaping up, he broke the blade smartly over his knee.

"There you are!" jeered the American, tossing the broken fragments of the dagger toward the Mexican.

That wretch had gotten upon his feet, snarling.

"Joe," begged our hero, turning, white-faced, to his chum, "lead the young lady's mule out of sight of here."

Understanding and nodding, Lannon approached the girl, lifting his hat.

"You understand, *senorita*? I have your permission?"

American and Mexican, both panting, crouched, glaring at each other as Lannon went away with the cause of all the trouble.

"You have taken a daring liberty, *senor*, in breaking my blade," cried the gallant.

"I'm going to break something else of yours now," retorted Tom Bolton, doughtily.

"What?"

"Your face! Look out!"

With a spring and a swing, Tom was at his adversary.

It was on even terms, now—each man with his fists.

But in that game a Mexican stands little show with an American.

Bump! thump! Tom's right and left landed in with two hard, jolting, dazing punches.

One landed on the Mexican's jaw, loosening some of his teeth.

The other blow broke his nose.

Down was the Mexican.

But Tom, now with his hot blood to the surface, and feeling that the other had forfeited every right of fair play, threw himself down on the fellow's chest.

Now, the blows fairly rained down on that Mexican's face, until there was not an unbruised inch of surface anywhere on that countenance.

All the while the Mexican yelled like a fiend, uttering every threat that he could think of.

With two final blows that closed the fellow's eyes Tom leaped backward and up to his feet.

"You can get up, now, you dog!" panted the boy. "Remember that you'll always get a thumping like this one every time you draw a knife on an American."

"You shall pay richly enough for this!" snarled the Mexican, limping away, sopping at the blood that streamed from his face.

"Any more threats," returned Tom, crisply, "and I'll

start in to give you that pounding all over again. Now, *vamos!*"

The Mexican's snarl was like that of a wounded wild beast. But he stepped off as briskly as he could down the trail in the opposite direction from the hacienda.

Jose, leading the burro, passed the vanquished one, looking at him with a shudder.

"Oh, *senor!* *senor!*" groaned the guide, in a scared undertone. "Why did you do a thing like that to a Mexican?"

"Humph!" uttered Tom. "I'd do as much for a Chinaman, if he needed it as badly."

"But now you will be a marked man. That gallant and his friends will track you everywhere. Your life will not be safe for an instant in the state of Chohuca."

"You mean they'll try to do me?" demanded Tom, looking sharply into the guide's eyes.

"They surely will, *senor.*"

"Then cheer up, Jose. If they start trouble with me, there'll be a lot of Mexicans singing 'Rescue the Perishing.' And there'll be a whole lot more Spanish spoken in heaven—or the other place—than there is at this minute."

With a hearty laugh, Tom turned on his heel, reached out for the bridle of his mule and walked forward.

Just around a bend in the road, as he had expected, our hero came upon Joe Lannon and the young woman.

The moment that Tom Bolton got a good look at the girl he felt all aquiver inside.

For this girl, who could not have been past his own age, was of the most perfect type of Spanish beauty.

Her skin was of olive tint, yet soft and creamy. Her eyes, snapping black, were big and luminous.

Red lips parted in one of the smallest of mouths, revealing small, perfect, pearly teeth.

Her figure, set off to its best advantage by her dark red riding habit, was slender and rounded.

Barely five feet in height, she made one think of a small Venus.

If Tom stared at her in uncontrolled admiration, he was doing no more than was Joe Lannon.

"I have to thank you for a very great service, *senor,*" murmured the girl, tremulously.

"A service?" echoed Tom.

"Yes."

"It was a privilege," replied the boy, gallantly.

The girl smiled with pleasure.

But Tom, afraid that his eyes would make a fool of him if he did not hurry, cut her short with:

"We are bound to escort you to your door, *senorita.* Which way does your path lie?"

"To the Hacienda Bonita, *senor.*"

"Are you Don Carlos's daughter?" demanded Tom, aghast with a sudden thought that made his heart ache.

"Oh, no," smiled the girl, showing her pretty teeth. "I am only the daughter of a poor dependent of Don Carlos. But he is a great man, a wonderful man, my father."

"He must be," murmured Tom, believingly. "*Senorita,*

you must feel uneasy yet. Shall we ride forward, leaving our guide to follow us?"

"I shall be your guide now, and a delighted one!" cried the girl. "Follow me!"

She urged her mule forward at a gallop, riding with a grace that set Tom wild as he followed her.

There was no chance for conversation. The girl rode at a gallop until she drew up on the grounds on the hacienda, not far from the great house.

An old man, bent and stooping, came out of the house.

"Papa!" cried the girl, waving her whip, and the old man came hastening toward her.

"Papa, here are two young Americanos, whom you have to thank for a great service to your daughter. Senors, I present you to my father, Dr. Manuel Ruiz."

Again an ache that was like a stab went through Tom Bolton's heart.

For the name of Dr. Ruiz was on the list of suspects against whom he had been sent to gather evidence for President Diaz!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

Dr. Ruiz, a mild-looking, almost silent old man, listened in wonder at the tale that his daughter told in her quick, delightful tones.

Yet, as her narrative proceeded, the old man's eyes flashed.

"Prado? He dared do that?" cried the old man, in a trembling voice in which there was no fear. "The scoundrel! I shall have to fight him!"

"Prado can't want any more fight just now, papa," laughed the girl. "This splendid young Americano has cured Prado of any love for fight."

"But I—your father—I must do something!" protested Dr. Ruiz.

"If there's anything more to be done, doctor," smiled Tom, "you'd better let me do it. I have my hand in now, and know just how to settle the rascal."

"You must guard yourself well," urged the old man, anxiously. "Prado is a swaggerer, what you Americans call a swash-buckler. He will be laughed at in this country if he lets his beating go unnoticed. So he will do his best to kill you—by stealth."

"Let him try," proposed Bolton, indifferently.

There was no use in borrowing trouble.

Trouble, indeed, seemed far away as he sat on the broad veranda of the great house, looking into the smiling, friendly eyes of Isabela Ruiz.

But Isabela soon absented herself, to see that the servants brought out refreshment.

"We are much at home here, my daughter and I," explained Dr. Ruiz. "It is, in fact, the only home we know. Don Carlos's father sent me, when I was a very young man, to a university in Spain. It was there that I became a doctor—a doctor of science, not of medicine, by the way."

"You are a scientific man?" asked Tom, interested.

"I serve Don Carlos, as I did his father, as chemist and assayer, in connection with whatever work is done at the mines on this hacienda."

Isabela came out with servants, who brought water, lumps of sugar and cigars.

In some parts of Mexico the traveler places a lump of sugar between his teeth and sips the water through it.

This much Tom and Joe accomplished. But, as neither of them smoked, they watched Dr. Ruiz do that.

Then Isabela went away again, this time in search of Don Carlos, whom she brought out to the veranda, and to whom she presented the young Americanos.

"Senors, I beg that you will make my home your home while you are in Chohuca," said Don Carlos, hospitably. "My house, its servants and all on the hacienda are yours. Do with them as you will."

It is the usual form of Mexican invitation, and means far less than it says.

Tom, who was well aware of this, replied:

"Don Carlos, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We shall be glad to remain a little while on your estate, and we have a great favor to ask."

"Name it," replied Don Carlos, grandly. "Yet it is yours before you ask."

"Don Carlos, we are down here on a vacation from our studies," lied Tom, glibly, following out the plan he had formed days ago.

"Ah! I am interested," cried the owner of the hacienda.

"We are studying to be mining engineers," Tom continued. "We have heard of the mineral wealth on your lands. We ask only that we may prospect for our own practice. Naturally, if we discover anything worth while, the results will be yours, since the land is yours. And, as we have our own tent, we ask permission to pitch it on one of the hillsides near here."

"All that you ask, and more, is yours," cried the Mexican, grandly.

Very likely he was more than pleased at the prospect of having some free prospecting done over his thousands of acres.

Jose, in the meantime, had come up with the burro, which he had halted under one of the great trees.

"Ah, here come three dear friends of mine," murmured Don Carlos, as the patter of fast hoofs rang out at a little distance.

Now, a trio rode up to the door in whom our friends were greatly interested as they were presented.

These were Samuel Trescott, an American, about thirty-five years old, a tall, slim, sandy man, with an uneasy eye that was, however, full of courage; M. Paul Beaudois, a nervous, middle-aged Frenchman; and Herr Donner, fifty, fat, and of an overbearing manner.

The newcomers, all of whom were among the suspects on Mendez' list, treated the boys with tolerable politeness, but quickly left them to go inside, Don Carlos following, after taking a more courteous leave of the boys.

Isabela, too, slipped away, leaving only Dr. Ruiz to chat with the young Americans.

Under the circumstances Tom felt that it was best to withdraw.

Accordingly, they ordered Jose to take the burro to a hillside not far away.

Here, with the help of the guide, they pitched a simple camp.

Jose agreed to remain with them until the morrow, sleeping in the open.

It was dark by the time that the boys had made their camp as comfortable as they could.

Then, soon after supper, they turned in to sleep.

Tom awoke about midnight, unable to sleep longer, Joe, too, stirred.

"Feel like taking a little stroll, old fellow?" whispered Tom.

"Just what I was thinking of," uttered Lannon.

Rising and stretching, next pulling on their shoes and trousers, and slipping on their jackets, they stepped out into the open, where Jose was snoring merrily.

There was no moon, but the stars gave considerable light.

They reached the crest of the hill, and stood looking down into the valley road below them.

"What does this feel like?" asked Joe, curiously.

Tom was about to answer, when, instead, he gripped his chum's arm.

"What does that look like?" demanded our hero.

Just into sight on the valley road came a party of a dozen men, armed with rifles and machetes.

They were stealing forward, plainly bent on mauling.

"Joe," gasped Bolton, suddenly, "look at the figure of that man leading! And he has his face swathed up. It must be Prado—coming to do by force, under cover of the night, what he failed to do in the daytime! Quick, old fellow, and we can stop that outrage! Get your rifle!"

An instant later, provided with the repeating rifles which Colonel Mendez had added to their outfit, Tom and Joe went skulking toward the great house, yet hiding from the marauders by keeping behind the hill line.

Having a short cut over the marauders, the two boys reached quickly, and unseen, the shelter of a clump of mango trees barely three hundred yards from the house.

Within that house all was silent, not a light showing.

Stealthily as so many shadows, the marauders crept closer.

That their purpose was hostile was proved by the cautious manner in which they advanced.

Next, they started to surround the house, only three men remaining in front of the entrance.

"Its time to stop that!" panted Tom Bolton, bringing his rifle to the shoulder and pointing up into the air.

Then, at the top of his voice he shouted:

"Don Carlos! Wake up! Thieves are about! Wake your household!"

Bang! bang! rang out a fusillade of unaimed shots from the boys' rifles.

There was instant consternation among the marauders.

At the command of their leader they ran hastily back from the house, bunched, and then—

"Glory!" gasped Joe Lannon. "They're heading straight this way, to wipe us out for spoiling their pretty game!"

It was true. The marauders of the night were now bent on vengeance!

CHAPTER IV.

A TEN-STRIKE, SURE!

"The Americanos! Vengeance!"

That shout came in a bawling voice that the boys were sure they knew.

Not a doubt now remained that Prado, the unfavored suitor of Isabela Ruiz, led these midnight marauders.

"Scatter out there, my friends!" cried Prado. "Kill the Americanos, if we can do nothing else."

"This means business," glowed Tom, as he dropped to one knee. "Get busy on your own side, Joe. Shoot as straight as you can. We'd better have the funerals in their families instead of in ours."

Crack!

Tom sighted and fired as he spoke.

It was a miss, but at the second shot he had the grim satisfaction of seeing his man drop.

Lannon, also on one knee, had gotten busy by this time.

Finding themselves fired upon, the marauders had fallen on their faces, worming their way through the grass.

"And they're blamed hard to hit!" growled Joe.

"I wish I could make out Prado now!" gritted Tom Bolton.

All the boys could see was the flash of hostile rifles.

Bullets whistled and zinged about them, but in that exciting moment the boys forgot to be afraid.

They were too busy to have any time for fear.

Not being able to see their assailants plainly, they had to content themselves with firing at the flashes.

But now a ringing shout came from the house.

"Hold out, my brave Americanos! We'll soon put the scoundrels to flight!"

It was the voice of Don Carlos. That Mexican was mustering his swiftly aroused household.

Arms were kept everywhere on the hacienda.

From the laborers' quarters poured men armed for the fray.

But at the first shots from Don Carlos's party the attackers broke and fled—fled wildly, helter-skelter, each man intent only on saving himself.

Two of the fugitives carried wounded comrades on their backs.

"Let up," advised Tom, throwing his own rifle down.

"We don't want to shoot into men's backs."

"No," growled Joe. "It'd be a shame to shoot rattlesnakes in the back!"

Within sixty seconds the atmosphere had cleared.

There was no longer a shot to be heard, nor one of the marauders to be seen.

Tom, jumping up, went down toward the great house at long strides, Lannon keeping at his heels.

But our hero suddenly stopped, looking shudderingly at something that lay in the grass.

"One of us got him," uttered Joe, solemnly.

"He's dead—poor scoundrel!" muttered Tom, after a brief look at the still figure.

"Well done, my Americanos!" sounded a cheery voice behind them.

It was Don Carlos, who had come up unnoticed.

"Ah!" he cried. "Whom have we here? Prado's brother. Oh, oh, my young American friends, Mexico will soon be a hot place for you. This Prado now has double cause to hate you. And he is a brave hater!"

"We've taken care of ourselves, so far," returned Tom, grimly.

"And I hope you will, to the end of the chapter. But you must come into the house for the remainder of the night. Your tent is too exposed when men prowl about for vengeance."

"Oh, we'll stay up until daylight, now," proposed Tom, coolly. "We were up and around, Don Carlos, because both of us had had all the sleep we wanted. We'd much rather remain up for the rest of the night, and be ready in case the rascals try to come back."

"But for your timely alarm," went on Don Carlos, "the scoundrels would have entered the house, and would have succeeded in rushing the Senorita Isabela off into the brush. Prado is a determined rascal."

"He won't bother us much after this, I'm thinking," growled Trescott, who had come up behind them.

"Ah, my good friend, what mean you?" demanded Don Carlos.

"Prado is too vengeful a scoundrel," murmured the American.

"Therefore——?"

"I shall see to it, Don Carlos, that he does not trouble anyone much longer."

Trescott's tone was full of meaning. His uneasy eyes had an unholy light in them at this moment.

"Ah, if you do that, Senor Trescott," cried Don Carlos, "be sure that you do not imperil us in other ways."

There was meaning, too, in Don Carlos's voice.

But Tom and Joe looked away, pretending not to understand.

Donner and Beaudois came up together, now, each only partly dressed, yet each carrying a rifle and looking ready for business.

"Our young Americans are the bravest of the brave," smiled Don Carlos. "Had it not been for our arrival I believe they would have been content to fight Prado's whole crowd."

"Why not?" asked Tom. "It was kill or be killed."

"But men who are not brave," replied the Mexican, "never think of that."

"You are certainly a pair of good, plucky young Ameri-

cans," said Trescott, with an attempt at heartiness that did not wholly please our hero.

"You are fond of adventure, you young men?" queried Don Carlos, when he had led the party back to the veranda.

"From what we've had of it," spoke Tom, with enthusiasm, "I believe we could live on it."

"Fighting comes natural to the Irish," explained Lannon.

"But could you fight for the pure fun of fighting?" asked Don Carlos, musingly.

"Why," smiled Tom, "that strikes me as being the only thing to fight for. There wouldn't be much fun about it if we had to fight just because it was our trade."

"You would fight for a principle?" asked their host, slowly.

"Just the thing," vaunted Bolton.

"Even if it was only another man's principle?"

"Why, yes, if we liked the man who owned the principle—sure thing!"

Don Carlos said no more for the moment, but Bolton knew that the Mexican was, covertly, looking around at Trescott, Beaudois and Donner.

"Ah, well, it is only when one is very young that fighting for fun or for a principle appears glorious," sighed Don Carlos.

"The trouble is," ventured Tom, "that in these days it's so hard to find anyone else who is willing to fight for a principle. Few men want to fight unless it's just their own fight."

"You speak," smiled Don Carlos, "as if you'd make a good revolutionist."

"And I'll bet I would," returned Bolton, promptly, "if I found a revolution that I believed in. There are a good many governments that ought to be overthrown by force. But I forgot," he added, with a quick smile, "that I am in Mexico, where it is dangerous even to talk about revolutions. President Diaz, I am told, does not deal lightly even with talk on the subject of revolutions."

"President Diaz is a very old man," murmured Don Carlos, thoughtfully.

"And one of these days, when he dies, you think there may be a revolution in Mexico?" queried Tom, quivering inwardly, for he was working close to the point now!

"Possibly," ventured Don Carlos, thoughtfully, "we shall not have to wait until Diaz dies."

"Humph! It won't come in the short time that we're here in Mexico! Of course not! No such luck! I've always wanted to see a real war, with a good, hot old revolution for choice!"

"You are jesting on what is sometimes a dangerous subject," remarked Don Carlos, thoughtfully.

"Jesting? Not a bit!" declared Bolton. "Yet I might as well be. It'll never be my luck to see a revolution start here or in any other country."

"And you would really like to see one?" pressed Don Carlos, softly.

"Yes, if it were against a tyrannical government."

"Do you think President Diaz a tyrant?"

"No," said Tom, bluntly. "I am in Mexico now."

A low chuckle came from Herr Donner.

"My American friend is properly cautious," he declared, looking at the others.

"Then you have no opinion to express of the president of Mexico?" pursued Don Carlos.

"Not while I'm in Mexico, anyway," said Tom, drily.

Don Carlos uttered an exclamation of some impatience.

Tom yawned, as if he would like very much to change the subject.

Yet, all the while, he was playing the deepest game he had ever played in his life.

He was trying to drive Don Carlos to the sticking point—to the point of making a declaration!

A soft step sounded behind them. It was Dr. Ruiz, coming out, tremblingly, to thank the young Americans who had again saved his daughter.

"And my daughter, the senorita, begs me to add her thanks, which she will express better herself in the morning," added Dr. Ruiz.

"Doctor," laughed Don Carlos, "we are trying to pin Senor Bolton down to a declaration. Perhaps you can aid us."

"What is the subject?" asked the old man, mildly.

"We are trying to get his opinion of President Diaz."

"Why—er—I am sure he must have the highest opinion of our worthy president," hinted the old man, cautiously.

"Decidedly," added Tom, in a voice that meant nothing.

"Yet the young man declares that he could be heart and soul a revolutionist against a tyrant."

"Well?" challenged our hero, boldly. "Where's the tyrant?"

"You are dodging us!" cried Don Carlos, almost angrily.

"I never declare myself, when others won't," smiled Tom.

"But suppose there were a revolution in Mexico——?" began Don Carlos, hintingly.

"Is there?" asked Tom, directly.

"Dodged again!" uttered Herr Donner, with a sound of disgust.

"Who dodged that time?" asked Tom, looking up as if for casual information.

"I—I believe I'm getting—sleepy," yawned Joe.

"I'm not," retorted Tom. "No more sleep to-night."

Don Carlos rose, strolling to the end of the veranda, puffing hard at his big, black cigar. Trescott soon joined him.

Tom watched them both eagerly out of the corner of his eye.

"Oh, Beaudois! Donner!" called Trescott.

Dr. Ruiz looked toward the group of others to which he was not called.

Then the old man bent his head, studying the ground, as if he saw something there.

"By the way, Bolton!" hailed Trescott.

"It's coming!" throbbed Tom.

Yet there was no trace of excitement in his voice as he turned his head to ask:

"Well?"

"Can you come here a moment?"

"Without my friend?"

"Bring Lannon, too, if you wish."

"Do you know," smiled Tom, as he and Joe strolled toward the quartette at the end of the veranda, "this looks mysterious."

Trescott took the lead, at once, crisply.

"We are not going to make any mystery of it any longer," he announced. "Bolton, we're going to give you a chance to back up what you said about loving a revolution. There is one even now on tap. It extends pretty well over Mexico. The four men in front of you head the movement in this state of Chohuca."

"Three foreigners to one Mexican?" asked Tom, as if surprised.

"Well, yes," confessed Trescott, "foreigners are interested in the movement. It's because the present Mexican government puts an inhuman burden of taxation on foreigners who want to do business in this country. Then, again, when Diaz fights the revolution, and finds himself embroiled with a good many foreigners, he'll get into rows with foreign governments. That will make it easier for the revolution to succeed. Now, the point is, since you are young and full of fight, will you join us?"

Tom was bubbling over with inward delight.

But he had yet much to gain that would require clever fencing.

"I take it you're in earnest, gentlemen," he answered, slowly. "Now, while I'm young I'm not a fool—at least, not wholly so. Not being a fool, I don't care to get into any half-baked revolution, where we do a lot of shouting and hurrahing for a couple of hours, and burn some powder—and then surrender to superior forces and walk away to be shot for the crime of rebellion. If it's a toy rebellion I don't want it. If it's a real rebellion against Diaz, one that there'll be some real war and campaigning in——"

"You'd join such a revolution?" cried Don Carlos, eagerly. "And stick to it?"

"Such a revolution," replied Tom, quickly, almost eagerly, "I'd stick to to the finish!"

There was a double meaning to his words that escaped his hearers.

CHAPTER V.

SOLDIERS BY BLUFF.

It was a long night's talk that followed.

Don Carlos appeared to be better and better satisfied as it proceeded.

"You are brave youths, and you will fight," he cried, with satisfaction. "More than that, you are foreigners, and we want all the foreigners in the movement that we can get."

"If they are trustworthy," added Trescott.

"Oh, of course, if they are trustworthy," agreed Don Carlos. "But we cannot doubt our young friends here."

"I don't want to utter any threats," hinted Trescott. "Of course that is out of place among friends, even new friends. But I hope you young men understand that you have gone so far now that there can be no going-back."

"None is intended," Tom replied, promptly.

"Because, of course, you realize that it wouldn't be possible for traitors, or even those who talked indiscreetly, ever to get out of Chohuca alive."

"As for me," said Tom, quietly, "if I'm to be killed, I want it to be in the field, with a rifle in my hand."

"That's the talk!" approved Trescott.

"There's no danger, is there," asked Tom, innocently, "that the revolution will triumph without a lively fight?"

Don Carlos appeared delighted.

"I'm off for bed," he announced gaily. "I shall sleep well until into the morning."

Trescott, Beaudois and Donner followed him, after earnest good-nights to the youngsters.

Dr. Ruiz went up last of all. He had not much to say, even while he remained.

Don Carlos had stationed a few of his laborers, armed, around the place to ward off any return that might be attempted by the Prado gang.

As for our two young friends, the instant they found themselves alone, they gripped each other's hands with fervor.

"Say," wondered Joe Lannon, joyously, even if slangily, "are we the cheese?"

"Do they trust us, do you think?" whispered Tom.

"Does a cat love fish?" grunted Tom. "Sure they trust us. Else, why'd they ask us in?"

"It was hard work bringing them around to it," sighed Tom, contentedly.

"And say, you're a wonder the way you did it!"

Too excited by far to think of sleep, the two American youths left the veranda to pace the grounds until daylight, which was now not far off.

They were back at their tent for breakfast, which Jose cooked for them.

Then they paid their guide off and allowed him to start on his return journey to Tres Angeles.

Back at the great house, the first one they met was Isabela.

She came to the door, in a cool, sweet toilet, as fresh and beautiful as any tropical flower.

"Oh, I must try to give you some idea of my great thanks to you," she cried, eagerly, but moving forward shyly as she gave each a hand.

"Your father?" asked Tom. "Is he up? Is he feeling well this morning?"

"I have just come from him," replied the girl, with a sudden smile at both boys. "And I am delighted to know that my father is greatly pleased with you both."

"That's because we've made believe join the revolution," thought Tom, with another heart-ache. "Good heavens!

I wonder if Isabela is in that revolution, too? If she is——"

Tom winced under the surface as he looked at the lovely girl.

"I can't begin to grow soft, though," he muttered, fiercely, to himself. "I took too strong an oath of service to the Mexican government! I've got to stick to my oath and do my whole duty!"

Don Carlos was out soon after. He expressed great regret that the boys had breakfasted already, instead of waiting to eat with him.

"But you will lunch with me," he added, pleasantly, his black eyes snapping at them.

Then Herr Donner reached the veranda, and Isabela, greatly to our hero's disappointment, fled.

"I have been wondering, as I dressed," began the German. "Both of you young men handled rifles excellently well in the night. Have either of you had any military training whatever?"

"Only that we've been pupils at a military boarding school in the United States," replied Tom, unblushingly.

"Ah!" cried the German, delightedly. "And you were expert at drill?"

"Why, we were both lieutenants in our cadet company," Tom assured his hearers.

"Then you could drill a company of infantry?" demanded the German.

"Easily enough," Tom declared, coolly.

"Good!" ejaculated Donner, his face beaming.

"Wonderful!" cried Don Carlos. "Now, my friends, you are just what we need in our movement."

A servant summoned Don Carlos and Donner to breakfast.

"Do you know anything about military drill whatever, Joe?" whispered Tom.

"Not a blessed word of the lingo?" confessed the Irish lad. "And you, Tom Bolton?"

"Even less," admitted Tom, ruefully.

"Cheer up," bubbled Lannon. "We can make it up. These dubs won't know the difference."

"The seniors would be glad to have you come and sit at table with them," announced a servant, coming out.

Tom and Joe were quickly seated at table with the revolutionists.

"I have just been hearing of a new feature of your accomplishments, my fellow Americans," remarked Trescott. "I hear that you have both spent time at a military boarding school."

"We make no secret of that," smiled Tom.

"As for me," bubbled over Lannon, "I've had a fairish bit of training in that line. I was one year at West Point."

Tom groaned inwardly. This sounded like rubbing it in. He wondered if their hearers realized that Joe was now just barely of age to be admitted at West Point.

"You were a cadet at the United States Military Academy?" asked Herr Donner, looking intently at Joe. "When was that?"

"He was dropped, for poorness at mathematics, just before we came to Mexico," Tom broke in, quickly, before Lannon could find a chance to put his foot in it.

"Yes, dropped," confessed Lannon, without shame. "But I was near the head of me class in drill—which is what you gentlemen want."

"Now, indeed, we are getting along famously, with a West Pointer in our ranks," cried Don Carlos, who looked decidedly happy this morning.

From the fact that their host spoke freely before the two servants who waited at table, Tom was quick to conclude that these serving men were also in the ranks of the plotted revolution.

But the meal over, the party broke up.

"We will lunch between three and four this afternoon," announced Don Carlos. "Young gentlemen, this evening I will take you to one far more capable than I of judging just how expert you are at military drill."

"Going to take us before an expert, is he?" groaned Joe Lannon, as soon as he and Tom were alone. "We can't fake up a drill, then. Murder! What a scrape! They'll be on to us, and chuck us by the neck!"

"And you put your foot in it, old fellow, by that unfortunate remark about your having been at West Point."

"I thought it was a good bluff to chuck!" remarked Joe Lannon, dolefully.

"It's going to be a mighty hard bluff to make good."

They stopped whispering, for Isabela was coming toward them.

"Everyone else has gone off to duties of one kind or another," she smiled. "Don Carlos and his friends are all busy men. As you have nothing else to do, would you like me to show you Don Carlos's library?"

"We'd enjoy anything that you manage for us," replied Tom, with great alacrity.

The compliment, backed by his plainly admiring look, was so boldly open that Isabela blushed as she turned to lead the way into the house.

Don Carlos must have been truly a lover of books, for in the two great rooms that comprised his library there were more than three thousand books.

Isabela led them by the shelves, calling attention to the great variety of works there.

Tom showed a lot of interest for a half an hour.

Then, for a moment, he allowed Joe and the girl to get a little ahead of him.

A moment later he caught up with them.

"We must be going to our tent, now senorita," he said, calmly. "We, too, have some duties to attend to. We cannot thank you enough for this charming hour."

Joe followed our hero, realizing that there was something in the wind, and trying hard to guess what it was.

But not until they had passed well inside their tent did Tom break forth.

He held up before Joe's eyes a little volume, bound in blue leather and lettered in gilt.

"See that, old chum?"

Joe read:

"United States Infantry Drill Regulations."

"I spotted that, tucked back almost out of sight, in one of the book-cases," Tom went on, joyously. "Isn't it a find? Now, get off your coat, Joe, and we'll do some of the tallest studying we ever did in our lives."

A bright boy can learn fast when he has to. Tom and Joe felt that they had wonderfully improved their knowledge of military matters by the time a servant arrived with the information that Don Carlos awaited them at luncheon.

They carefully hid the welcome book, then hastened to the house.

Luncheon was a joyous meal. No reference was made to military matters until the feasters were rising from the table.

"Now, my young friends," beamed Don Carlos, "we—you two and I—are going to Tres Angeles to-night."

"To-night?" echoed Tom. "Then we shall camp two nights on the way."

"Not so," smiled the Mexican. "We go in my automobile, and shall be hardly above two hours on the way."

"Automo——"

"I have the only automobile in this part of Chohuca," explained the Mexican, proudly. "The car will be here in half an hour."

Even over poor roads that automobile killed distance surprisingly.

The journey was made in about two hours and a half, two of Don Carlos's men being on the front seat, while the owner and our boys occupied the seat in the tonneau.

"To the barracks," ordered Don Carlos, as they entered the city.

"The barracks!" uttered Tom.

"We have many good friends," smiled Don Carlos.

"I should say so!"

The barracks at Tres Angeles is a rather imposing affair, sheltering, usually, a battalion of four companies, and being large enough for a regiment of infantry.

"Say to Major Guerra," requested Don Carlos, of the corporal of the guard at the main entrance, "that Don Carlos Cespedes and two American friends seek the pleasure of an hour's visit with him."

The visitors were quickly admitted to the private apartments of Major Guerra, a stout, important-looking Mexican of fifty, in full uniform.

Don Carlos whispered in that officer's ear for a moment, as soon as the callers and their host were left alone.

Then the major wheeled upon the boys.

"My friend tells me that you have military training?" he asked, eying them closely.

"At a military boarding school," Tom replied, wondering if the bluff was to be promptly called.

"And one of you put in some time at West Point?" pursued the Mexican major.

"I did," admitted Joe, not very jubilantly.

"And your name is Joseph Lannon?"

"Yes, major."

Guerra walked to a book-case, picking up a small, flat volume.

"This is the West Point register," he explained. "I have been looking for the name of Joseph Lannon, but I do not find it."

"Thunder!" groaned Tom. "That's a bad mess Joe has got us into!"

Doubtless Lannon, too, quaked in his boots, for Don Carlos looked, at least, annoyed.

But now the Irish lad's native wit came to his rescue.

"Faith!" he ground out, favoring the two Mexicans with a humorous wink. "Ye don't suppose I'm thravellin' under me own, real name—in Mexico!—do ye?"

"The sly rascal!" laughed Don Carlos, looking relieved.

Major Guerra, without expressing an opinion, proposed:

"Now, to see what you know of drill?"

"Ah!" cried Joe. "Now ye have us on something less embarrassin' than our reasons for being in Mexico under different names from the ones we used at home!"

"Bright old Joe!" throbbed Tom, gratefully. "He has pulled us out of the hole he got us into."

In the questioning that the major put them through the boys, fresh from hours of hard conning at that little blue book, came out in fairly good shape.

"You'll do, I think," nodded Major Guerra.

Then, in a more confidential voice, after a swift look at Don Carlos, Guerra continued:

"You understand, senors, that, when the moment comes to strike our blow at Diaz, I undertake to swing my battalion of four companies over to the revolution. But four companies of regulars are not enough.

"So we have some two thousand men who are not soldiers. These men need drilling, and it was unsafe for me to go about drilling them. So we have hesitated until now. But now you two can act as drill instructors. You can go from point to point, drilling these two thousand recruits. Then, when we strike, we shall have twenty-five hundred trained men. That will bring thousands of recruits to us at the right moment. Then the State of Chohuca shall be able to furnish its quota of men to the revolutionary army that shall drive the tyrant Diaz from power."

Drill the recruits? Tom Bolton's head fairly buzzed with excitement and triumph as he now saw how thoroughly this opened the chance for him to do the work that Colonel Mendez had set him to doing——

All for President Diaz!

CHAPTER VI.

GHASTLY NEWS!

"I'll thank goodness when I'm out of here!" ejaculated Joe Lannon.

"Out of this tent, you mean?"

"No! When I'm out of the whole blooming State of Chohuca!" growled Lannon.

"I can't say that I will," sighed Tom.

"Oh, that girl!"

"Isabela?"

"Well, she's worth fretting about," admitted Joe. "You're in love with her beautiful face——"

"Her perfect, pure soul!" thrilled Tom.

He was deep in the throes of his first love.

"You can't say too much good of her. She's a fine girl," agreed Lannon, enthusiastically. "There's only one thing prevented me from falling in love with her."

"What was that?" Tom questioned, wonderingly.

"I saw you had the best show, so I was wise enough to keep out."

Tom sighed.

"I don't see that I've much show, either," he whispered.

"We had to put Dr. Ruiz's name in among those of the other revolutionists."

"But you softened that all you could by writing that Dr. Ruiz wasn't a real revolutionist," Lannon argued. "You wrote that old Ruiz made believe to be in it just because he feared to offend his employer."

"Well, that's the truth," challenged Tom.

"Of course it is," agreed Joe, warmly. "And when we explain that to Mendez, Ruiz will be released from arrest."

"Heavens! I hope so," shuddered Tom.

Four weeks had gone by since their first meeting with Guerra.

In that time the boys had traveled to many points in the State of Chohuca, drilling the recruits of the revolution and fitting others to do the drilling.

Probably no new troops were ever so badly or imperfectly drilled, but Tom and Joe did the best they could with only book-learning on the subject on tap.

But they had done more. They had prepared rosters of the companies and battalions of these troops.

Naturally, these rosters showed the names and addresses of all the recruits of the revolution within the limits of the State of Chohuca.

Thus it would be easy for the government to place its strong hands on all the revolutionists of the rank and file.

These rosters had all been taken to Don Carlos for hiding in a safe place—but not until our boys had secretly copied every roster.

These copies were buried now in the ground under the tent.

With these rosters were also the names of the more prominent leaders of the revolution in the State.

In other words, Tom Bolton and Joe Lannon had secured all the information that they had undertaken to get in the service of President Diaz.

"I know we're doing right to serve the President of this country," sighed Tom. "Yet sometimes it seems almost sneaky of us."

"Not a bit," glowed Joe, warmly. "Haven't you said, yourself, that Mexico never was a civilized country until Diaz became President? Even if he is a stern man, he makes the laws respected, which no President ever did in this country. He put down crime and made life pretty safe in Mexico. He made the courts honest. If he has

been severe, it has been only because he has insisted on giving Mexico a square deal all the time."

"These revolutionists are not one-two-three with Diaz," murmured Tom, soberly. "Mostly they're rascals, like Trescott, Beaudois and Donner—mere dirty, foreign adventurers. And Don Carlos would be a bandit if he wasn't a rich man instead. No; my conscience is clear, Joe, in serving President Diaz. Look at the way Trescott did about Prado, for instance. Of course, I'm glad Prado isn't annoying us. But Trescott acted little better than a pirate."

Prado had disappeared. Trescott had smiled grimly, letting it be guessed that he had hired bravos to put Prado out of the way.

For Trescott himself was a suitor for the hand of Isabela Ruiz.

This he admitted to our hero, not even seeming to admit that Tom Bolton could by any possibility aspire to the love of the girl.

As for Isabela herself, she treated Trescott kindly.

Tom had not dared to ask her "how the land lay."

"I can't speak to the girl," he groaned, "while I'm in danger of sending her poor old father to be hanged."

"Say," murmured Joe, happening to peer out through the door of the tent, "here comes Sanchez now. You talk to him while I go outside and make sure that nobody else gets within listening distance without you getting the signal."

Sanchez, Mendez's agent in the secret police at Tres Angeles, the boys had seen and talked with briefly twice on recent visits to the city.

He had told them that he would be out on this date, disguised as a traveling peddler, to receive from them the lists and the other information they had collected.

This would be sent at once to Colonel Mendez, who would probably then declare that the American youths had finished their task, and would release them from their work.

Joe sauntered out as Sanchez, leading a well-laden burro, stopped at the foot of the slope.

"You want to buy?" hailed Sanchez.

"What you got?" asked Joe.

"Most everything, senor, and of the best."

"Come up and let's have a look."

As Sanchez came up the slope, Tom, too, came out of the tent.

Sanchez, after grave salutations, began to undo his packs, displaying many wares.

So it was easy, after a little, for Tom to take him into the tent without arousing the suspicion of any one who might be looking on from a distance.

Now the lists, rosters and other written information were passed swiftly over to Sanchez. He wrapped the papers up in portions of his pack.

"Probably you are through here now," Sanchez announced. "You will receive word soon. Colonel Mendez

is much pleased with the way that you have done your work. He wrote me to say as much to you."

"How soon will the police get busy with arresting these people?" asked Tom.

"Who knows?" asked Sanchez, shrugging his shoulders.

"But probably soon. There is one grave problem, however, and that is the arresting of Major Guerra. He is in the midst of his battalion, the only troops in Chohuca. Now, if the police try to arrest him at the barracks he will summon his soldiers. If they stand by him the revolution will be started at once, and no man could tell where it would stop."

"Get him out of Chohuca," murmured Tom. "Have the government summon him to the City of Mexico."

"He would suspect."

"Not if the government were to summon him on a matter of promotion. Let the government inform him that he is to go to the City of Mexico to receive his commission as colonel. No soldier objects to promotion. It would delight Guerra especially to be made a colonel before the outbreak. It would show his fellow-rebels that he was a more important man."

"I will suggest that to Colonel Mendez," cried Sanchez, looking delighted.

"And remember that Dr. Ruiz, though on the lists, is only a simple old man, who has no heart in the movement. He should not be punished."

"That is for the government to decide," replied Sanchez, cautiously.

"Oh, it is, eh?" flared the boy, inwardly. "We'll see!"

For a long time Sanchez remained in the tent talking with our hero; Joe, all the time lying under a tree outside, being an alert sentinel.

It was within an hour of dark when Sanchez came out, having left behind several articles of his pack, as if Tom had bought them.

Now the pretended peddler went a little distance away from the tent, tied and fed his burro and cooked his own supper over a fire of twigs.

Just after dark Sanchez started back over the road to Tres Angeles.

"We'd better go over to the great house and see what's doing," suggested Tom.

"After I've washed up," agreed Joe.

It was darker still before they left the tent. In their soft shoes the boys proceeded silently down the hill slope, across the level ground, and then towards the garden before the great house.

As they proceeded now they heard the low murmur of voices close at hand.

Some instinct must have warned Tom to grip his chum's arm and then go forward with great stealth.

The voices came from the other side of a little fringe of flowering bushes.

Again gripping Joe's arm meaningly, Bolton shot forward as softly as the cat moves.

Trescott, Herr Donner and Don Carlos were talking on the other side of the bushes.

Their voices came low. Only the most attentive ears could hear clearly what they were saying.

"I hope you're right, Don Carlos," murmured Trescott.

"Time will show," replied the Mexican.

"But if time shows against us, we are destroyed."

"What do you think, my German friend?" asked the Mexican.

"I hardly know what to say," Herr Donner replied. "The young men have been very enthusiastic, and they certainly have drilled the recruits well."

"But that very long visit of the peddler?" suggested Trescott.

"We could not hang the boys on that," grunted Herr Donner.

"We'll soon know whether they deserve hanging!" muttered Trescott.

"You have been doing something?" questioned Don Carlos, eagerly.

"Something? Well, almost something!" jeered Trescott, harshly.

"Then you are going to tell us," insisted Don Carlos.

"I had intended to wait until I knew whether my suspicions are founded," went on Trescott. "But, now that the cat is out of the bag, I may as well let you know at once. Don Carlos, I have picked out six of your best men and I have sent them two miles up the trail. They will act as robbers and waylay that peddler."

Tom Bolton started as if he had been shot.

Joe Lannon almost snorted with fright.

"What will be accomplished, my friend?" demanded Don Carlos.

"That will depend, Don Carlos, on what your men find on the person or in the pack of the peddler," replied the American adventurer, significantly. "There, do you hear those shots in the distance? Those are the robbers at work now!"

Four or five rifle shots rang out.

"Your men must have discovered something, Don Carlos!" cried Trescott. "From the sound they are executing that peddler. That, also, was in my orders!"

"Then the American boys——"

"They shall die," cried Trescott, harshly, "if anything has been found that incriminates them. They cannot get away from here! They cannot hide in this wild country that your men know so well! If they suspect and flee, we can hunt them all over the State of Chohuca—and we will. If we find that they have been traitors, and if they get away from here, we will station assassins even at the railway depot at Tres Angeles to kill them as they board a train in flight!"

"I don't like the looks of things since the shots," growled Herr Donner. "The shots tell a tale of treachery, to my ears."

"Come," urged Don Carlos, "since the shots have been fired we must lose no time. We will hunt the American

boys down. Then if there is aught against them we shall have them!"

Tom and Joe faced each other, their faces deathly white with this certainty of death at hand.

In Sanchez's pack were the documents in their own writing.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RACE WITH DEATH.

"If we suspect, then let us lose no time," urged Herr Donner, hoarsely.

The three plotters sprang away, passing almost in sight of the boys.

Their hurried flight for the tent on the hillside left two American youths staring at each other in dire dismay.

"We're dished now!" groaned Joe.

"Unless we can think like lightning!" retorted Tom Bolton.

"I—I can't think at all!" stammered Joe, dismally, miserably.

"I can, then!" whispered Tom, seizing his chum's arm. "The thought has just struck me. But we've got to fly, and be as still as can be. Don't stop to ask questions. Follow me!"

Tom was off, bending low and running fast, yet almost without noise.

Joe, after staring and gasping for an instant, went in blind but steady pursuit.

Tom was heading straight for one of the great stables at some distance behind the house.

Joe could half guess what was up, yet hardly dared to think he was right.

The entrance door to the great stable was closed, but a smaller side door was open.

Through this side door Tom bolted, after looking back over his shoulder to make sure that his chum was at his heels.

Through a broad hall and into another room behind the entrance door they raced.

Here a dim lantern threw its feeble rays over the great, still mass of Don Carlos's great fifty-horse-power, hill-climbing automobile.

"You are going to take the machine?" throbbed Joe, his eyes opening wide.

"If I can make her run! It's our only hope!"

"Do you know how to run a car?"

"I've only a guess at the game," panted Tom. "I want to see if the guess is a good one."

"Glory, but this is a great game, sure!" throbbed the Irish lad.

But Tom, busily looking over the great machine, whispered:

"Look at the state of the gasoline tank—quick!"

"Full—almost!" reported Joe, a moment later.

Tom Bolton, trembling with the suspense and the agony caused by the thought of capture, was experimenting with the sparker.

Then something began to move—a steady chug-chugging that increased as Tom found his guess partly working.

"We can start it! I'm sure we can!" quivered Bolton.

"Joe, help me to swing the big doors open."

There was a rumble. Then the big sliding doors moved.

The world was wide open before them—if they could start the auto, and if nothing happened!

"In with you—like lightning!" throbbed Tom, as he sprang to the front seat.

Joe flopped in at the other side, while the machinery whirled under them.

"Careful now!" urged Joe.

"No time to be careful!" groaned Tom. "We've got to make a try, hit or miss! Oh, thunder! The lights!"

Both boys flopped down to the floor of the stable.

They got one of the twin searchlights lighted, Joe shielding its glow with his coat until Tom was up and at the lever.

"In like lightning now, old chap, for anybody can see the light when you take your coat away."

Joe got that coat away and himself inside the car all in about two seconds.

With an inward prayer Tom moved the lever.

Rumble! and the thing was rolling out of the stable.

With a cry of joy Tom turned on more speed—then more, and more!

The car seemed almost to leap from the ground now as it shot forward.

"Most of our luck is in the next sixty seconds!" pulsed Tom Bolton, as he shot down the road through the familiar grounds.

His heart was moving faster than the machinery underneath.

Joe, having nothing to do with the machinery, crouched forward, scanning every bit of the road where that bright light threw its rays.

They were past the house now. They thought they heard shouts behind, but could not be sure over the rattle and clatter of the heavy machinery.

"There's the hill—the old tent!" thought Bolton, with a start of memory, as they rounded the bottom of the hillside, going at nearly forty miles an hour.

And now, not a hundred yards up the slope from the road, danced three frantic men.

"The boys!" screamed Herr Donner.

"Stop, you scoundrels!" bawled Trescott.

"Stop! That's my car!" shrieked Don Carlos.

Tom pressed his lips grimly as he shot the car on through the night.

That was all they heard from their enemies.

Still running at the rate of two-thirds of a mile every sixty seconds, it seemed like the work of a moment or two to leave the hill and tent a mile behind.

They were off along the deeply wooded road now.

"You're slowing up, ain't you?" called Joe in his chum's ear.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"So we won't pass Sanchez's body if it's lying anywhere along the road. Keep your eyes open."

Half a minute later Joe reported what Tom had already seen:

"Six men coming along the road. Must be Sanchez's assailants."

"Yes. Duck low, so they don't see your face."

Tom crowded on another burst of speed just before he came upon the six returning Mexicans, one of whom was leading Sanchez's burro.

They stepped to the side of the road as the car came whizzing along.

"A pleasant night's ride for you, Don Carlos!" called one of the men.

Then the car shot past in the darkness of the night.

"By the time they find out their mistake there's nothing at the hacienda that can overtake us—not even a cannon-ball!" laughed Tom, gleefully. "Now, barring accident, Joe, old chap, we're safe to reach Tres Angeles."

"And then?"

"Heaven only knows! I don't like to think too far ahead."

"There's some one in the road! And got a gun, too!"

True enough, a man stood right in their way, and sighting coolly along a rifle barrel, at that.

"Just as soon be shot now as any other time!" ground out Tom Bolton.

He was about to crowd on speed and take a chance on running over this human obstacle, but Joe caught his arm excitedly.

"Glory! It's Sanchez!"

"What!"

Tom brought the car to a jarring stop, just as a voice rang out:

"Halt, in the name of the law and of President Diaz!"

"Sanchez, old fellow, don't you know your own crowd?" demanded Tom, joyously.

The police agent gasped joyously, lowered his rifle and bounded forward.

"Jump down, Joe, and get that other lamp going," throbbed our hero. "Sanchez, get up and ride with me."

"But how——"

"That's what we're going to ask you, too," jerked in Tom, swiftly. "But wait until we get started."

Flare! With that other big lamp burning, and both sides of the road now well illuminated, Tom Bolton felt much more master of his machine.

As Joe climbed into the tonneau our hero shot forward again.

"So those fellows stopped you and got the papers, Sanchez?" asked our hero.

"They got nothing but the burro!"

"What's that?"

"Nothing but the burro and the pack."

"But those papers?"

"As quickly as I left the hacienda behind I slipped them

from my pack into my pocket, then got out this American rifle. When those rascals ordered me to halt I gave them three swift shots and leaped into the thicket. I got away, though they fired some shots after me. I thought this car contained Don Carlos on his way to Tres Angeles to give the alarm. I was about to shoot when you stopped."

Tom Bolton throbbed in earnest when he knew that those blessed papers were safe.

Then, as they sped on, he hastily told Sanchez about their own escape.

"The government's knowledge can no longer be kept secret from the rebel plotters," groaned Sanchez. "We have the names, but we cannot proceed quietly. We shall be lucky if all Chohuca is not in revolt by daylight."

"No, sir! We'll stop that!" predicted Tom Bolton, promptly.

"How?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll tell you by the time that we get to Tres Angeles."

Sanchez smiled disdainfully, but made no reply in words.

A dark object loomed up ahead in the road. Then the lights showed it to be Dr. Ruiz, mounted on a mule and attended by a single laborer.

Like a flash a desperate resolve came into our hero's mind.

He threw on the brake, bringing the machine to a stop a hundred feet ahead of the old scientist.

"Dr. Ruiz! Oh, this is a fortunate meeting! Don Carlos sent me to find you. But jump in, Doctor. The business presses. I must get you to Tres Angeles in time. I can explain when we get there."

Dr. Ruiz appeared a good deal astonished, as, indeed, he was.

But when Tom again insisted that he bore orders from Don Carlos, the old man abandoned his mule to the laborer, then got in at the rear.

Once more Bolton glided along the road for Tres Angeles.

"Now, what mad, foolish business is this?" demanded Sanchez, suspiciously, in our hero's ear.

"If I don't tell you," smiled Tom, boldly, "it won't compromise you."

"Be careful that you don't compromise yourself, my lad!"

"Have no fear, Senor Sanchez. I know just what I'm doing, and it's important."

"Is it according to orders?" insisted the police agent.

"At least, it is within my discretion. I shall account to Colonel Mendez. Have no fear."

"Oh, all right, then," growled Sanchez, and settled back.

Truth to tell, Tom Bolton had not the remotest idea as to what he was going to do with trusting old Dr. Ruiz.

But in some way he meant to save that mild old gentleman from the fate of being shot to death in a barracks yard—which is the usual fate of the more prominent members of an unsuccessful revolution.

Even with all danger of pursuit overtaking them past,

Bolton did not run the car as slowly as he might have been expected to do.

For he was figuring in this wise:

"If I take two hours for the run, Don Carlos, by riding his best animals to death, will be only four or five hours behind me. Lord, what a short time, five hours is in the face of death!"

Just about on time, as our hero had figured it, the dirt-covered machine rolled down one of the streets of Tres Angeles.

"Will you get out now and walk to your home?" whispered Tom in the police agent's ear.

"But you?" demanded Sanchez.

"I shall be with you in a very short time, indeed. And I'll show you how to nip this revolution in the bud!"

Again that queer smile on the face of the unbelieving Sanchez.

"I must go to the telegraph station," declared the police agent. "That is at the railway depot."

"I'll take you there, then," agreed Tom.

Within two minutes they were at the Tres Angeles terminal of the railway service in the State of Chohuca.

Clambering out, Sanchez hastened to the telegraph division.

"Now, Dr. Ruiz," murmured our hero, "for the instructions that I bring you from Don Carlos."

Tom gave a big gulp as he wondered how to make his yarn seem the most probable.

"Don Carlos orders that you take to-night's train north, which leaves in twenty minutes," rattled on Tom. "You will cross the border into Texas, go to the Houston House in San Antonio, and there you will wait for the arrival of Professor Gregg. Don't forget the name—Gregg. He has a new cyanide process for getting at ores. Don Carlos thinks of introducing it into his mining work. He wants your opinion. After you have seen Professor Gregg you will talk it over with him, and then write to Don Carlos for further instructions before returning here. Now, is it all clear?"

"All except the way to get to Texas," smiled the old man, mildly. "I have barely two dollars with me at the present moment."

"Don Carlos, of course, foresaw that," replied Tom. "He has sent some money by me. It will be enough to take you to Texas. He will send you more before you are to return. And hasten now, Dr. Ruiz, that you may not miss your train. Senorita Isabela sends you her best love."

Tom gulped a bit as he told that big lie; but he hurried Dr. Ruiz off into the station and saw him aboard his train.

Our hero waited until the wheels moved and Ruiz was on his way to Texas.

Joe Lannon, left to watch the machine, favored our hero with a hard stare as the latter came back.

"What kind of a steer was that you were giving the poor old man?"

"The poor old man, who is also Isabela's fine old father, is on his way to Texas," smiled Tom. "When the crash

comes he'll be safe. He won't come back for two reasons: He has been told to stay in Texas, and he hasn't money enough to get back here, anyway.

"But that money you gave him?" insisted Joe.

"Police money, that I drew on account, laughed Tom Bolton. "I'll square that later out of what's coming to me."

Sanchez reached the side of the car in panting haste.

"I've telegraphed Mendez in cipher," he whispered. "But it's too late to do much here—too late! The revolution will be in full blast by daylight!"

"Will it, though?" flared Tom. "I've been thinking about that all the way to town."

"Nothing can be done!" groaned Sanchez.

But Tom Bolton retorted with a snap:

"Much—perhaps everything—can be done!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TOM, THE HIGH-HANDED.

The automobile lay housed in the stable behind one of the inns of Tres Angeles.

It had been dumped there almost unceremoniously by Tom Bolton.

Our hero had taken, at the same time, the precaution of removing and carrying away a small piece of the machinery, without which no one else could run that car.

And now Sanchez had the two boys hidden in his own apartments.

"Here we stop—helpless," sighed Sanchez, lighting a cigarette and puffing furiously.

"Here we just begin to work, if you've got any push in you," Tom retorted.

Sanchez stared at the American boy in polite surprise.

"How can we stop Don Carlos from reaching town?" he asked.

"We can't," Tom admitted, coolly.

"And he will be here, on a dying mount, in four or five hours. He will ride to the barracks. He and Major Guerra will have their suspicions more than aroused. Some one will cry out in the street, 'Long live the revolution!' and the recruits will flock out from the houses with their guns. Then the Major will stampede his soldiers to the revolution, and Chohuca will be aflame. You and I will be running for our lives! My young friends, there is a train leaving town for the City of Mexico at an hour and a half after midnight. I urge and beg you to escape by that train before the lightning strikes."

"Are you through?" asked Tom, mildly.

"Yes."

"Then listen. Major Guerra leaves by that train which goes a half hour after midnight. He goes to the City of Mexico."

"You are crazy!" uttered Sanchez.

But Tom, with a quiet smile, demanded:

"Do you know in this town a printer you can trust, and whom you can put to work at once?"

"Oh, yes. But how can a printer stop a revolution?"

"He can help," Tom murmured. "Go to the printer at once. Don't take any refusals. Make him lock his doors and set up the type with which to print a letter-head of the office of the Minister of War at the City of Mexico. We should have a few of those letter-heads here in half an hour if your printer is quick."

"But——" objected Sanchez, wonderingly.

"If you're going to break in with any of your stupid 'buts,' we'll lose this town and the State to the rebels to-night," cried Tom. "If we do, then, by thunder, Colonel Mendez shall know what a stupid ass he entrusted affairs to in Tres Angeles!"

Sanchez began to look frightened. He began to believe, as our hero intended him to believe, that Tom Bolton was entrusted with greater powers than Sanchez knew.

"Are you going to your printer?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, yes; at once."

"You've seen letter-heads of the office of the Minister of War?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then be sure that you have one printed that is an exact duplicate."

"But the sheets will be wet, Senor Bolton. The ink won't be dry."

"Then we'll have to dry them with blotting paper. Now, Sanchez, while your printer is at work you can find a man past thirty whom Guerra does not know."

"I have a police assistant whom the Major has never seen."

"And you can get for him the uniform of a major?"

"I have such a costume among my disguises."

"Then have your man and the uniform here at the same time that you bring the printed sheets. And are you good at imitating handwritings?"

"My assistant, Gomez, has some skill in that line. And, by a happy coincidence, there is a real Major Gomez down at the City of Mexico."

"All is well, then. Hurry! Every minute counts!"

And Sanchez, now fully convinced that he was obeying a superior, instead of trotting at the orders of a subordinate, left his apartment in double time.

"What on earth have you got up your sleeve?" quizzed Joe, who had been listening in wondering silence.

"Up my sleeve?" laughed Tom. "The fate of the Diaz government in the State of Chohuca."

"You're playing a big, desperate game, old fellow."

"It's the only kind of a game there's any real sport in playing," Tom returned, with a pretense of indifference.

Sanchez was speedily back with the wet letter-heads and with young Gomez, an erect chap, who looked a good deal like a soldier.

"One thing I forgot," muttered Tom. "A typewriter with a Spanish keyboard."

"I have that in my bedroom," mumbled Sanchez, and brought in the machine.

"Good, so far," approved Tom. "Now, Sanchez, go down

to the telegraph office and oblige the operator to send this telegram at once to Major Guerra."

Sanchez stared in further amazement at the slip Tom handed him, on which was written:

Guerra, Commandant, Tres Angeles: Major Gomez will report to-night, relieving you for five days, in that you may report to me in person. You are to be promoted to colonel, and other honors in store for you. Prepare to leave at once on the arrival of Major Gomez with written orders for you.

"MINISTER OF WAR."

"Whew! But this is bold!" cried the police agent.

"No matter!" Tom retorted. "You said you could trust your telegraph operator. Go to him at once and have him send that message, in telegram form, to the only man in Tres Angeles that we're afraid of."

Sanchez departed, his head in a whirl.

Then Tom turned to Gomez, dictating rapidly a letter supposed to be from the Minister of War to Major Guerra.

In this letter Guerra was informed that President Diaz had been pleased to promote him to a colonelcy. Guerra was to remain in command at Tres Angeles, but within the next few weeks another battalion would be added to his command. Guerra was ordered to report at once at the office of the Minister of War, taking five days' leave of absence for the purpose.

"Sign that on the typewriter," Tom directed, "in these words: 'By order of the Minister of War.' Now sign any name you please as secretary and the thing is done."

Police Agent Gomez looked over the official-looking document and laughed.

"By the saints, that is well done!" laughed Gomez. "That letter would fool me!"

"Let us hope it will fool Guerra," said Bolton, drily.

Sanchez returned to report that the faked-up telegram had been sent to Guerra at the barracks.

"And how soon does to-night's train from the City of Mexico get in?" Tom queried.

"It was just steaming in as I left the station," Sanchez answered.

"Then, Gomez," went on our hero, "hustle into that uniform, take your letter and hasten to Major Guerra, who will be boiling with surprise over the telegram. Make it plain to him that he is ordered to leave to-night at twelve-thirty."

"And if he balks?" faltered Sanchez.

"He won't," uttered Tom. "It will be great good news for him that he is to be a colonel, and that he is to have more soldiers to tempt over to the revolution. He won't balk."

Nor did Guerra refuse his orders, which he believed to be genuine.

Before one o'clock in the morning Sanchez was again back at his apartment.

"The trick worked," he cried. "Guerra is now speeding over the rails on his way to the City of Mexico."

"Of course he is," grinned Tom. "That's a big man off the board for us. I wonder how Gomez is enjoying himself as commandant at the barracks?"

"Why not go over there to see?" asked Sanchez. "Why not go over there to spend the night? Behind sentries you will be safer than anywhere else."

So Tom and Joe, too wide-awake for sleep on this exciting night, presented themselves at the stone gateway of the barracks.

Through the corporal of the guard they sent their names in to the new commandant.

Gomez, of course, received them. Behind closed doors he grinned at the boys.

"How easily you youngsters have made a great man of me!" laughed the police agent.

"Perhaps President Diaz will continue you in this position," smiled Tom.

Gomez, who felt no inclination to sleep, either, agreeably sat up to make a night of it with the boys.

He told them many incidents of his years of secret police service all over Mexico.

"Yet right here in Tres Angeles," he declared, "there is a mystery which none of the secret police have ever discovered. Somewhere in this city there is a clique of rascals who cause their enemies to vanish. Not a sign remains of the foe they condemn. Yet we doubt if there is violence. We have heard mysterious whispers of a River of Death. It is an evil stream that is supposed to flow underground hereabouts, and to flow to the bowels of the earth. Those who are condemned by the clique, I take it, are thrown into this underground stream and carried away. At least, it is known that they are never heard from again."

"That's a pleasant ghost story for this hour of the night," remarked Bolton, with a shiver.

"It is a very true story," returned Gomez, seriously. "At least, the secret police believe it."

At half-past three in the morning the corporal of the guard entered to report that Don Carlos Cespedes desired word with the commandant at once.

Promptly the two boys vanished into a cupboard, from which they could hear.

Don Carlos, panting, puffing, excited and worried, burst into the room, followed by Herr Donner, who showed signs of a rough, hurried trip in saddle.

Don Carlos drew back in surprise at the sight of Gomez.

"I—I came here seeking Major Guerra," he stammered. Gomez was all smiles as he bowed in his politest fashion, replying:

"I am here to relieve Major Guerra, who left on the midnight train for the City of Mexico."

Don Carlos appeared dumbfounded. Indeed, he was!

CHAPTER IX.

A CITY OF DUMB TERROR.

Tres Angeles, by the time that daylight was two hours old, was in a state of restless uneasiness.

People seemed to know that something was very wrong, without exactly understanding what it was.

It was known, for one thing, that there was a new commandant at the barracks, and that Major Gomez had made himself immensely popular through a speech to his soldiers, in which he offered them praise from President Diaz and promises of a much more enjoyable army life in the future.

But none of the soldiers appeared on the streets.

The barracks were closed to all callers, the soldiers remaining inside the walls.

What did it all mean?

People scented trouble, and most of them remained near their own homes that day.

The most-worried men in Tres Angeles were Don Carlos and his three foreign allies, Trescott, M. Beaudois and Herr Donner.

They were well-nigh frantic over the sudden going-away of their important military confederate.

With a new major at the barracks, and popular with the soldiers of the battalion, it would be impossible to seize and hold the city.

With Don Carlos and his foreigners was Isabela Ruiz.

Trescott had insisted that she be brought along, with a serving-woman as chaperon.

For Trescott had made up his mind that, at the worst, he would leave Tres Angeles behind, escape across the frontier into Texas, and thus escape the bullet that was the portion of the detected conspirator against the government.

So Isabela had been obliged to come, Trescott pointing out that, in the absence of Don Carlos's party, she would be anything but safe at the Hacienda Bonita.

Trescott intended further, if obliged to flee across the border, to coax Isabela with him on pretense of securing her safety.

Once over the Texan border with the girl, Trescott, who was madly infatuated with the girl, had no doubt that he could persuade her to marry him.

But Isabela, who wondered what had become of her father, gave nearly all of her thoughts to her missing parent.

Don Carlos, in the meantime, through a trusted man, had located his automobile where it had been left in the night.

"Those two American boys are at the bottom of all this," he declared, his face white with anxiety. "They are even responsible for the summoning of Major Guerra, who, I am certain, will be arrested on his arrival at the capital."

"Time for me to skip the country," reflected Trescott, and hurried off to the railway station to secure tickets to Texas for himself and Isabela.

But in twenty minutes Trescott was back, white as a ghost, shaking with terror.

"There are no more trains leaving Tres Angeles," he gasped, tremulously. "Not a train. And no one knows when another will leave or arrive."

"Then we may have to call out enough of our people to

seize a train and get away!" cried Don Carlos, in great alarm.

"There isn't an engine within a hundred miles," almost sobbed Trescott. "The government has called them away. We're shut off from the world—trapped! No place left but the woods. And soon there'll be soldiers to hunt us to death! Curse those boys!"

"If there's nothing else left," spoke Don Carlos, with an evil smile on his white lips, "there is vengeance, if those boys still remain in Tres Angeles. And I will find out."

Tom and Joe slept soundly through the early forenoon.

Safe in the quarters of the new commandant, and away from the dumb terror, they slept calmly until after eleven o'clock.

On awakening, they learned from Gomez what had taken place.

Tom heard, also, with a start, of the presence of Isabela with Don Carlos's party.

"Trescott means to find a chance, in the excitement, to spirit her away," the boy guessed, truly.

He asked Gomez what chance there was to leave Tres Angeles. Bolton was delighted when he heard how train service had been suspended.

Sanchez in the meantime was ceaselessly working. He was but little at the barracks, though much at the railway station, where he was in constant communication with the Diaz government over the wires.

"By night," hinted Gomez to our boys, "the town and the State would be safe from revolutionary plots."

"That means that more soldiers are headed this way, under officers who can be trusted," our hero guessed.

Then he fell to thinking of Isabela.

"I wish there were some way of getting word to her that her father is safe," Tom thought, greatly worried.

But there was only one sure way—to go straight to the party of Don Carlos at the hotel.

"I don't believe I'm a coward," grimaced the boy. "But I certainly wouldn't drop in on the Don Carlos crowd needlessly to-day. Lord, how they must be churning with hate for us just now!"

Tired of being cooped up in the commandant's quarters, Tom and Joe went down into the barracks yard, strolling about.

But even this was dull work.

The soldiers, though in ignorance of just what was astir, yet associated the uneasy suspense of the city in some way with these two American youngsters.

For that reason the soldiers did much staring at the young strangers.

"I'm getting tired of being rubbered at all the time," grumbled Joe.

"We might try a walk outside of barracks," smiled Tom.

"I wonder if it would be safe?" pondered Joe.

"I don't know why not. From the windows the town seems quiet enough—almost deserted, in fact."

"Yes, the town makes you think of the last ten minutes before a storm breaks," retorted Lannon, glumly.

"At least," ventured our hero, "we ought not to complain. It's about all our doing."

"I have a notion that I'm going to wake up soon and find that it all isn't true," protested the Irish boy.

Tom sighed again. He was thinking of Isabela and what he fancied to be her peril in Tres Angeles on this day of suppressed excitement.

"Let's go over to the gate and stand by the sentry," proposed Lannon. "Then we can look up and down the street, even if we don't see anything."

Understanding that the two young Americans were privileged characters, the sentry offered no opposition to their stepping past him into the street.

The whole scene beyond the gate was wofully deserted.

After standing there for fully ten minutes, Tom finally exclaimed:

"Thank heaven for that one sign of life!"

He pointed down the street to the corner below, around which appeared a driver leading a burro under a pack-saddle.

"Makes me think of Sanchez yesterday," grimaced Joe.

As the two boys stood there the driver eyed them as he drew near.

Then he motioned to our hero to come to him at the curb.

"I bear a message," whispered the man, "from your friend at the railway station."

"Ah!"

"He wishes you both to come to him."

"Now?" queried Tom.

"Yes; and you need not fear. The streets are quiet, deserted. I am to go with you and to guard you. Are you ready?"

"Why not?" nodded our hero. He beckoned to Joe.

Together they followed their guide, who ambled easily along, talking to his burro in undertones.

It was like passing through a city of the dead.

Down two or three streets they went. Before one handsome, big white building, that looked like a clubhouse, their guide halted with his burro.

"Is it not a fine old place?" asked the man, in a low tone. "Here, stand here, where you can get the effect of the entrance."

He placed both Americans on the same big square of paving block in the sidewalk.

In the doorway appeared a young Mexican, who regarded the two Americans with swift interest.

Tom Bolton stood glancing up at the balustrade over the entrance. Joe Lannon stepped back into the gutter just as the burro-driver turned on his heel and fled.

An ominous click under Tom Bolton's feet.

That square of stone gave way under his feet. He was shot downward, splashing in water.

The instant before the stone clicked up into place again his command floated up to terrified Joe:

"Don't desert Isabela! Tell Diaz how his enemies destroy his friends!"

Horried Lannon, staring down at the replaced sidewalk, gasped:

"That River of Death!"

CHAPTER X.

RUNNING AMUCK FOR LIFE.

After that first terrified gasp Joe stood as if petrified.

The horror of it all was too immense.

"Tom! Tom, old fellow!" he screamed.

Standing below the curb, he kicked, first with one foot and then with the other, on that treacherous slab of stone.

Yet, even in his fright, Joe had too much presence of mind to step on the slab with both feet.

"That was meant for both of us!" he raged. "My stepping back just as I did was all that saved me. But Tom! Can't I make him hear?"

Again he shouted until he was hoarse.

"I can't do anything alone. I've got to get help!" groaned Lannon. "Sanchez, he's the only one who can help to-day in this corpse-like city!"

Looking up suddenly, Joe gasped as he beheld five young Mexicans grinningly regarding him from the entrance doorway.

Two of them had just drawn knives, grinning at the American youth more wickedly.

"Since I didn't go down through the sidewalk—an assassination!" flashed through Lannon's seething mind. "Thank heaven, I'm a good runner!"

He wheeled, heading on a run for the railway station.

But now, as if out of the sidewalk, sprang three more men, barring the fugitive's way.

All three were armed with knives. They waited calmly, as if sure of their prey.

But Lannon, with his Irish fighting temper up, did not hesitate or falter.

He ran unflinchingly on, swiftly dodged the first man he met, ducked and grabbed up the second, raising him overhead and angrily hurling him at the third.

It was all over and done in a second—Lannon hardly knew how.

But the way was clear of human obstacles now.

He dashed on for very life now.

Crack! That shot came from a building that he was passing.

The bullet whizzed past his ear.

Joe couldn't stop to see where his assailant was. To linger meant certain death.

"The whole revolutionary crowd must be laying for us!" he panted, as he ran.

Two more shots rang out; two more bullets came within an ace of getting him.

"The murdering vermin!" raged the Irish lad, as he raced amuck down the street, on which not another soul appeared, yet which was alive now with danger.

Crack! crack! One of the shots registered well enough to carry away his straw hat.

"And not one of the greasers 'd dare to face me in a fair, stand-up fight!" gritted the fugitive.

Three single shots followed him in swift succession.

"They fight like a pack of wolves!" jeered Lannon, desperately.

Another shot, and Tom thought for an instant that that bullet had reached him.

But he soon realized that he was unhurt.

"It'll be queer if so much shooting doesn't bring out the garrison," thought Lannon.

"Just two minutes of life—two minutes! That's all I pray for now!" quivered Joe, as he shot around a corner, racing desperately, breathlessly, and caught sight of the railway station only a few hundred yards away.

"But what if Sanchez shouldn't be there? What if I meet another pack of these murdering revolutionists?"

Lannon's thoughts were enough to give him a bad case of shivers, but he still ran, for in flight only did there seem to be any chance of finding aid for Tom Bolton.

"If the poor old fellow is even still alive!" Lannon half sobbed. "The River of Death! That underground stream that Gomez told us about, that flows off somewhere into the bowels of the earth! That must be it. Oh, Tom, Tom! I wonder if there's any show of your being still alive? Or are you drowned by this time, floating helplessly away?"

There were great tears in Lannon's eyes, but his fists were doubled and clenched hard with the wild desire to have vengeance on some one for the dastardly trick played upon his loyal chum.

Toot! toot-oot-oot!

"Am I dreaming—or crazy?" gasped Lannon. "Or is that the whistle of a train coming in at the depot? Oh, it's crazy I must be, for the train service has been stopped."

He halted in the deserted square, wondering whether to go on, and, if not, which way to turn.

"For now I mistrust," he groaned, "that I'll never find Sanchez there. The whole thing is a hideous nightmare. Will I never wake up?"

Lannon laughed a hard, despairing laugh.

But in the next instant he rubbed his eyes hard.

Then he stared.

For down at the entrance to the railway station appeared groups of soldiers.

"Aw, sure, it's dreaming I am!" gritted the boy, unbelievably. "Soldiers over there, when I left 'em all locked up in the barracks!"

Still, there seemed something wonderfully real about these uniformed men over at the station.

Moreover, these men before his eyes wore blanket rolls and haversacks, canteens and cartridge pouches.

Altogether, they looked different from the soldiers Lannon had left behind a few moments before.

"I'll have a look at them!" quivered the boy. "If they ain't real soldiers, but only parts in a dream, I'll make them prove it!"

His breath coming more freely now, Joe Lannon started on a spurt for the depot.

"Yes, surely these soldiers were live men of real flesh, for when they beheld the wild fugitive running at them they stopped their talk and stared at him.

And Joe, rushing up breathless, saw on their hats the number, "33." Now the men back at the barracks belonged to the Twenty-seventh Infantry.

There were more soldiers piling out of the depot now.

What a huge rabble of them!

"It's a new regiment come here to put down the trouble!" uttered Joe to himself, yet half aloud.

Then, as he dashed forward:

"Where's Sanchez?"

"Here!" answered that police agent, working his way through a crowd of Mexican army officers. "Why, it's you, Senor Lannon! What's wrong?"

"Everything!" blurted Joe. "But principally Tom Bolton!"

Then, in his quivering, frenzied sentences, Joe managed to tell of the horrible thing that had taken place.

"The River of Death!" gasped Sanchez, himself turning white.

"That's it!" roared Joe. "Hurry!"

But Sanchez, looking at the Irish lad with an expression of added horror, replied:

"There is no use in hurrying. If your friend has dropped into the River of Death he will never come out again."

"How do you know that, man, until you've tried?" blazed Joe Lannon. "Hurry, in the name of heaven!"

"Do you know the exact place where it happened?" questioned Sanchez, in an agitated voice.

"Know the place, is it?" echoed Lannon. "I can take you on the run to that house. I can point out the very slab of stone!"

"Then, at least, we shall solve what we never knew before, the place where the River of Death is entered!" cried Sanchez, his voice shaking, though his eyes flashed.

"Hurry!" raged Joe. "Will you never get started?"

"Senor Colonel," said Sanchez, turning to a white-haired officer, "may I ask for a company of your men to go forward at the double-quick?"

"Captain!" spoke the Colonel, sharply, turning to one of his younger officers.

In almost a jiffy, now, one of the companies of infantry was loosely formed.

With Joe Lannon for their guide this company dashed up the street at a slow but steady, jogging trot.

There were men enough here for a work of rescue.

Joe Lannon, now that he was backed by soldiers, felt suddenly so weak that running seemed a torment.

He knew there was every chance that his delayed quest was in vain!

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE BLACK DEPTHS.

Tom Bolton, shooting straight down into the black depths, had only time to think of Isabel and of his mission.

He shouted those two short, frenzied sentences upward at Joe.

Then came the splash.

Even in his bewilderment and terror our hero knew the meaning of the water.

"It's the River of Death!" flashed into his whirling brain at the first wetting.

Then down he went, over his head.

Something seemed drawing him down with a terrible clutch.

But Tom fought upward, desperately.

His hands struck something solid.

He clutched at that something, without having the least idea what it was.

How he held on—with what grimness!

For youth holds tightly to life!

He opened his eyes—tried to think clearly.

First of all, the boy realized that he was in a place of intense, utter darkness.

He could see nothing, not even his own frantically gripping hands, holding to something that must be a slight projecting ledge of rock.

If that should give way!

Or if he should be washed away from it!

For all the time something in that moving water seemed to be tugging remorselessly at his body.

Only his head and the tips of his shoulders were above the surface of the water.

A fine spray dashed constantly into his face.

He closed his eyes to keep some of the water out, for in this complete darkness open eyes were of no value.

"Joe!" he shouted frantically. "Joe! Joe Lannon!"

Hideous, mocking echoes came back to him, rebounding as if from slimy, jagged points of rock overhead.

In all that mockery of echoes he wondered if he could really hear Lannon's voice.

Or was that thought, that belief, only more mockery?

"Yes, yes, Joe! I'm here!" Bolton shouted frantically. "Get help and get me out. I can hold on for a little while."

As if to jeer at his helplessness, the waters caught him and whirled our hero on.

But again he caught at something, and again he clutched.

"Oh, Joe!" he shouted. "Get help quick!"

This time only the echoes sounded above and around.

"I floated too far away!" half-sobbed Bolton. "Now Lannon can't hear me at all."

Then came the sickening thought:

"What's to be the end of all this? For I can't hold on for very long, with this horrible suction of some sort dragging me down!"

Again he called wildly to Lannon.

Next came the startled thought:

"Hadn't I better save my breath to aid my strength in holding on? But—oh, dear! Oh, merciful heaven! Will holding on do anything else but prolong the agony of being alive in this River of Death?"

Had he dared, Tom Bolton would have swum about a bit,

trying to get some clearer idea of the nature of the watery grave in which he found himself.

"But if I let go I may not find anything again to hold on to," he quivered, sick with horror and suspense. "And this awful suction! It seems likely to pull me down to the center of the earth!"

But presently there came a calmer streak.

"I'm going to gain nothing by getting excited," he told himself. "If there's any possible way, Joe Lannon will bring help to me. If he can't—and I suppose he can't—then it will be best to die as calmly as possible, and not end up by going raving mad."

Mad!"

That grewsome word, as it popped into his mind, gave the boy another awful shudder.

"Tom Bolton, you'd better face that word, 'crazy,' solemnly and bravely. If you don't and get over this silly laughing, crazy will soon be a mild word to describe your condition."

Then, keeping unnaturally quiet, he tried to hear some sound of the world above.

But from overhead there came not a sound.

"And no wonder," he told himself. "I must have fallen sixty or seventy feet—if not a full hundred. Of course, there's no sound to be heard away down here."

But what could Joe be doing all this time?

"Perhaps dead already from some Mexican's knife!" shuddered Tom Bolton. "At least, that would be a merciful death!"

Again, in an unguarded moment, the projection of rock to which he held slipped from his grasp.

Away he was swept, fighting, struggling, trying desperately to keep from going down under the influence of that dreadful suction.

How long he swam, how long he fought, he could not guess.

But at length his hands again touched a rock-bound wall. Groping, struggling, he found another projection of rock, to which he held on with the sternness of despair.

Though he did not let go, his mind did let go with that awful realization that his fate could not long be staved off.

At first strange voices buzzed in his ears, tormenting him.

Knowing that these were only delusions, he tried to reason them away.

But, his mind becoming more frantic, the delusions increased.

Now his hollow, idiotic laughter rang out, coming back to his disordered mind a thousandfold in the echo.

It seemed as if all the fiends of the universe were laughing, jeering, jibing at one hapless, dying boy.

It was only instinct now—not reason or desire—that made Tom Bolton still cling desperately to that bit of solid, projecting rock.

Against his hold the downward suction of the water fought for the mastery.

It was the struggle, the instinct of self-preservation, that

made him strive to hold on now, for Tom Bolton's mind was far away in a region peopled by mocking fiends.

"They'll get me soon!" he jabbered incoherently.

Then in the darkness a strange light assailed his eyes and danced before him.

Another delusion!

Tom's piercing scream rang out. He sank back, choking, his mouth filling with water.

In his disordered mental state he saw a grinning fiend approach and wrap him in its writhing arms.

Then Tom Bolton gave up, his mind floating off into nothingness.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

When Tom Bolton opened his eyes again it was in life.

At least, Isabela Ruiz's face was bending over his.

Had she died, too?

"You know who I am, don't you?" she asked.

"Of course I do," Tom faltered, in a weak voice. "The sweetest, dearest girl alive!"

That not being exactly the answer that Isabela had expected, she blushed, drew her face back and was silent.

"All right, old chap?" murmured Joe Lannon, in a whispering voice, as he moved his face into range of view.

"Oh, yes, I'm all right," nodded Tom. "But where did Isabela go?"

"I'm here," replied the girl softly, moving back into sight.

"Don't go away again," begged Tom. "Your face is good to look at."

This time Isabela did not blush, but seated herself in a chair at the bedside.

Joe, who had glided away, came back, followed by a Mexican in uniform, who wore the cross of Geneva on his collar.

He was an army surgeon, who had come in with the new regiment.

"Oh, the young man will do all right now," spoke the surgeon, cheerily. "His brain was threatened from the shock, but his head was strong enough to bring him through."

"Are you going to let me sit up, Doc?" demanded Tom.

Dr. Carrillo laughed, but replied:

"Yes, you may try, as soon as you've had some breakfast. But don't abuse your strength."

Then Joe brought water and washed his chum's face and hands.

Next he propped him up on the pillows, pleased at the amount of strength that our hero displayed.

"Joe," spoke our hero, at last, "you needn't try to keep it from me. There is something worrying you."

"There's nothing to worry about," spoke Joe, blithely.

"Oh, well, I suppose you'll tell me later, when you think I'm strong enough," sighed Bolton. "But, say, Joe, I wish you'd ask whoever is tramping outside the door to go a little more lightly."

Lannon looked confused.

Tom Bolton fixed a keen look on his chum's face.

"You might as well come out with the truth, Joe. That sentry is on special duty and we're under arrest."

Joe Lannon looked as if he didn't know what to say.

"Is that true?" insisted Tom.

"Yes."

"Was it about—because—Isabela's father?"

"I guess I might as well tell you the whole, straight story," grumbled Joe Lannon.

"Yes, you might just as well. It will save time and questioning."

"Well, then, Tom, it turns out that Dr. Ruiz was the secretary of the revolutionary movement here in Chohuca."

"I knew that," said Tom, calmly.

"What! You did?"

"Certainly."

"Tom, you made the mistake of helping one of the biggest guns in the rebel crowd to get out of Mexico, beyond the reach of Mexican law."

"He wasn't a big gun. He was only the poor slave, the tool of Don Carlos."

"He was big enough gun to be secretary of the revolutionary party."

"That was because he was an educated man, and also because he had been trained to hold his tongue about the affairs of Don Carlos."

"Well, he's gone, and we can't go," laughed Joe, trying to put a brave face on the matter.

"Who ordered us under arrest?"

"Colonel Mendez, by wire from the City of Mexico."

"Are we to be tried here, or taken to the City of Mexico?"

"I can't find out a thing," Joe replied. "All I know is that Sanchez told me that Mendez was hopping mad."

"Don't you worry, anyway, Joe, old chap," urged Tom, soothingly. "When we get a show at a trial I shall make it plain that you had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, I'm not worrying—not for myself," Joe replied, in an accent of indifference.

"I wonder how long it will be before our trials?" mused Tom.

"I can't guess. Trials happen suddenly in this country, you know."

"Why?" demanded Tom, looking up swiftly. "Have there been any trials yet?"

"Some," replied Lannon, coolly.

"You might as well tell me the whole thing. In the first place, how long have I been here?"

"This is the third day."

"Third day? Whew! And the last I remember was when two grinning devils grabbed me down there in the dark water."

"The wonder is that the force of the water didn't suck you right down out of sight at once. You must have put up a terribly hard fight," surmised Lannon.

"Oh, didn't I, though?"

"Well, that underground stream must have been discov-

ered by Don Carlos and other members of the club, whose building is right beside the hole. Machinery from inside the club building operated that slab in the sidewalk, so as to let down into the hole any one who had the bad luck to be unpopular with Don Carlos's political club."

"The great scoundrel!"

"Don't speak ill of the dead," begged Joe, gently.

"What! Don Carlos dead?"

"Shot yesterday, outside the barracks wall. You jumped when the volleys ripped out. We were watching you."

"Any one else shot?"

"Herr Donner, M. Beaudois and Trescott, and a few others."

"What! Don Carlos and all his associates? And those associates were foreigners. Didn't the ambassadors of their countries interfere?"

"Nit interfere!" retorted Joe. "They were notified, of course, but the French and German ambassadors followed the lead of the American minister in declaring that foreigners who come here and break the country's laws must pay the bill as the courts direct. So Don Carlos and his foreign friends got a short trial before a military court and then were sent out and shot."

Tom was silent for some time, but he brightened up when a soldier came in with the breakfast and Isabela and a middle-aged Mexican woman followed.

It was always his plan, when possible, to face tough luck on a full stomach.

Breakfast down, Tom asked the girl and her companion to step into the hallway until Lannon could help him get into his clothes.

Soon dressed, Isabela and her chaperon were admitted again.

"I'd like to get out in the sun a bit, but I suppose the sentry would stop me," hinted Tom.

Isabela at once burst into a flood of tears, falling on her knees at his side and kissing his hand with Mexican fervor.

"You have done all this for me—saved my father at your own terrible cost!" she cried.

Tom started, went a bit white around the lips, then caught himself and braced.

"Why, that's all right, Isabela," he smiled, cheerily as he could. "I knew what I was about. This arrest is purely formal. I'm to be held until I account for my act—that's all. I've got good reasons to give the authorities."

But Isabela, though she dried her eyes and tried to look cheerful, showed plainly that she was not comforted.

Tom turned to his chum as soon as Isabela stepped over to speak to her chaperon.

"So you've been holding the news back, eh, old chap? I'm to be shot for deliberately getting the secretary of the revolutionary party out of the country—is that it? Was that why the army surgeon took such an infernal lot of trouble to get me well again?"

"Oh, well, it ain't settled yet whether you're to be shot or not," returned Joe, a bit gruffly.

"Not much use trying to get information out of you, is

it?" smiled Tom, wistfully. "All right, Joe; I'll just go ahead and imagine the worst that I can, and then I'll know that that's what you are trying to hide from me."

"To tell you the plain truth," blurted Lannon, "I don't know a hanged thing about what's to become of us. But I know that about a dozen men have been tried, and every one of them shot by the troops. The rank and file of the revolution, while they're known, thanks to the work that you and I did, have been pardoned; and so, of course, they're now whooping things up hot and heavy for the government of President Diaz."

"And as to your fate and mine you don't know a word?"

"I shall fight like the dickens to get you acquitted, Joe, and let them do what they hanged please with me."

"Oh, I'm in the same boat, and not going to do the baby act, either," retorted Lannon, grittily.

"Joe," whispered our hero, "Isabela isn't a prisoner, is she? Tell me the truth."

"She a prisoner? On my soul, she isn't, old fellow! She's as free as the air. President Diaz doesn't make war on women who have done no wrong."

"Thank heaven she's safe!" breathed Frank, fervently.

"Is she going to join her father?"

"As soon as our case is settled."

"She's free to go, then?"

"She could leave on the next train going north to the good old United States—if she had the price of a ticket."

"She hasn't the money, then?"

"Strapped!"

"Poor girl! Joe, there isn't any way we can slip her any money, is there, old fellow?"

"We haven't got a cent," Joe returned. "All we did have was police money, and that was confiscated the instant the telegraphic order of arrest came from Mendez."

"Oh, Lord! It seems bitter to think of leaving that poor child unprotected and penniless! All I did, after all, was to save the father at the cost of the daughter! And he's as 'busted' as she is."

"Oh, Dr. Ruiz can earn money, all right," murmured Joe, cheerily. "Remember, that old man is a crack-a-jack scientist. He can get a good job in any American mine or smelter works."

The roll of wheels was heard in the barracks yard.

A few minutes later the sharp, heavy tread of heels, mingled with the jangling of sabres, was heard in the corridor outside.

Then the door was thrust roughly open, and Colonel Ropera and half a dozen other officers clanked into the room.

"Is this the military court?" wondered Tom, throbbingly.

Then, catching sight of another man at the rear of the party, our hero, forgetting his weakness, leaped to his feet.

"Colonel Mendez!" he cried.

Mendez, in citizen's dress, stepped through the party of officers and moved forward, fixing his stern, invincible eyes on the boy.

"Bolton!" rang the old police chief's voice. "You do not quiver and cower before me? You are not afraid, after your treachery?"

"Afraid!" thundered Tom, his voice quivering with the wrath of a righteous sneer. "Treachery! Colonel Mendez, if I had you alone by yourself, with no one to interfere, I'd cram that lying word ten feet down your throat! Treachery! Who was it that stopped the spark of revolution in Chohuca from bursting into the explosion of a rebellion that would have spread by telegraph to all the other States in this part of Mexico? Who was it that acted with so much brains and promptness that President Diaz has not now on his hands a revolution that it would take a year or two of fighting to put down? Treachery! You ingrate!"

If Mendez appeared astounded, his look did not belie his feelings.

"Has not Sanchez told you that it was my plan that stopped the revolution here the other night—my plan that sent Major Guerra away from the chance of doing harm?"

"I have not seen Sanchez yet," replied Colonel Mendez. "I came at once to you on my arrival here."

"Then you'd better see Sanchez before you talk to me! You'd better find out just what I did to save your government from a crash that would have ruined it. You'll find that if it hadn't been for my plans, carried out on the rush and jump, then Chohuca at this moment would be in the hands of the rebels, and other nearby States would be pouring in recruits to fight the regiments of the Mexican army that might have remained loyal. Treachery! Go get your facts, man!"

"And now, of what am I accused?" Tom went on in a softer voice. "When you find out what your government owes to me, Colonel Mendez, you will realize of what a heinous crime I stand accused. There was a harmless, mild, loving old man, devoted to his only child, his daughter, and trained through two generations to be faithful to his employer. He went into the revolutionary plot—yes, I admit that. He went in just as he would have gone into anything else that interested his employer. But Dr. Ruiz had no enmity to President Diaz. Dr. Ruiz never did a thing, except hold his tongue, that was against the government."

"I have not seen Sanchez yet; have not heard what he has to say," murmured the head of the political secret police.

"Go and see him, and listen to him, then," advised Tom, sinking wearily back into his chair.

At a sign from Mendez the army officers withdrew with him.

"Whee! whoop!" rumbled Joe. "You put the case up strongly that time. Now, if the Mexicans want to shoot us—why, I'll look upon the shooting simply as the shortest cut out of their miserable country!"

Isabela moved swiftly to Bolton's side. To the horror of her chaperon, the girl bent over, lightly kissing the boy on his forehead.

"I go now to pray for you," murmured the girl.

"Now, if it's all the same to you," smiled Tom, "I'd a heap rather you stayed here to let me look at you. I may not have much time for that, you know."

It was an hour before Colonel Mendez returned, followed by Police Agent Sanchez.

"My dear boys!" cried the old chief, rushing up and seizing each by a hand. "Senor Sanchez has told me! It was a bold and daring thing that you did, but you have the great merit of having succeeded. I have taken the liberty of ordering you released from arrest, pending the coming of a reply to the telegram that I shall send to the government of President Diaz at the City of Mexico."

Before the night was over an answer came, praising instead of blaming the boys. They were ordered to report at the capital for their reward.

Yet, before starting, Tom borrowed enough on account from Colonel Mendez to pay the passage of Isabela and her attendant over to San Antonio, Texas.

Tom and Joe received the thanks of President Diaz in person later.

For their own share in a really wonderful piece of political police work the boys received a reward of ten thousand dollars each, American money, and more than enough expense money to carry them rejoicing on their way to San Antonio, in the good old United States.

When Tom arrived there he lost no time in inquiring the state of Isabela's heart. He had one of the strongest cases that ever an eager lover had to put up.

Dr. Ruiz lives in the Southwest now, a mining expert.

Tom and Joe live near by on a ranch that they bought, and on which they are prospering and living the life that they love.

Tom's youngest sister, Bess, came down to be at his wedding with Isabela.

Bess remained to become Mrs. Lannon later on.

Both of our friends hear occasionally from Police Agents Sanchez and Gomez, who are still in the service in other parts of Mexico.

THE END.

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